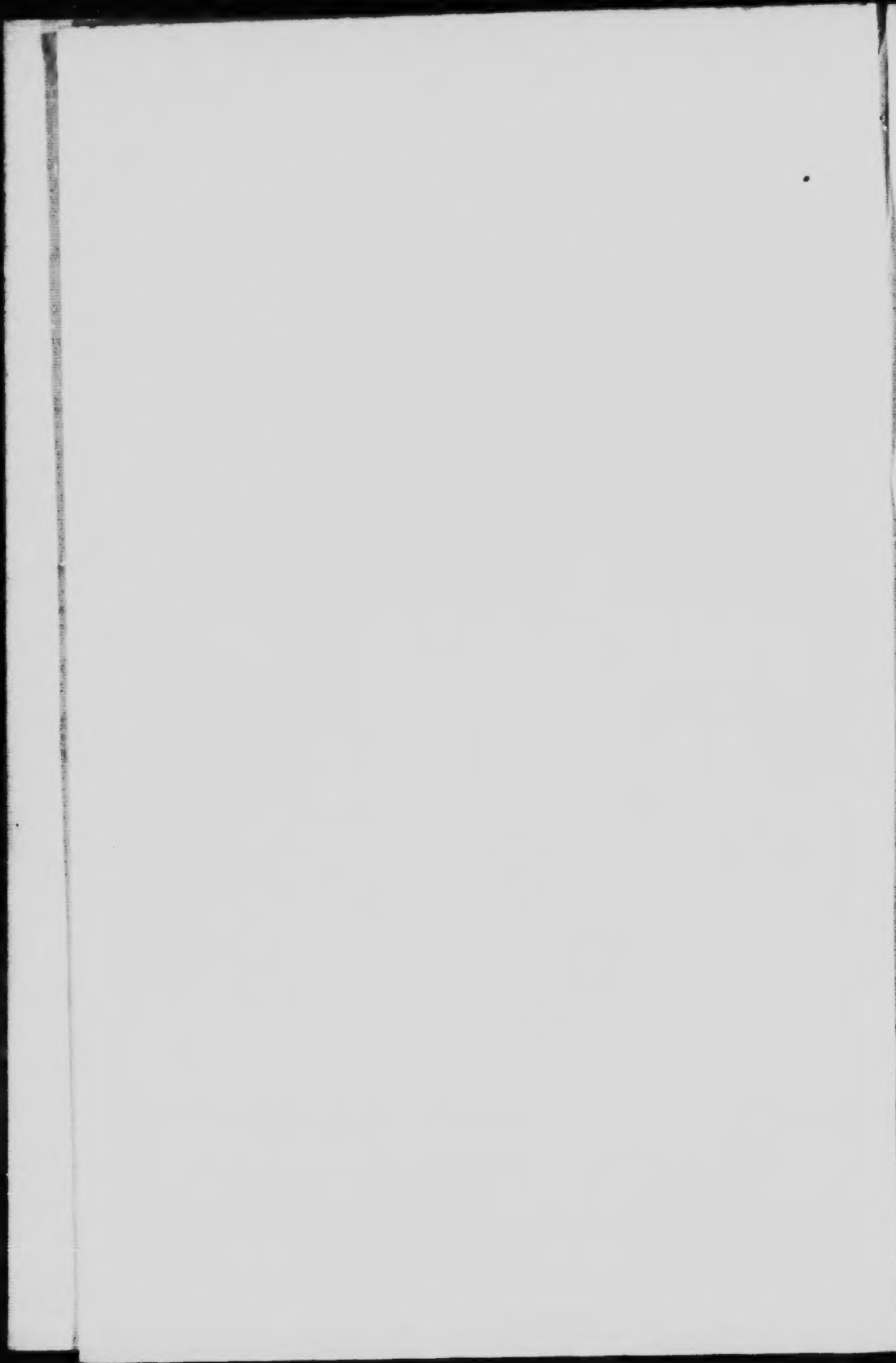




JOCK O' RIPPON

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BY
CHARLES SWINTON



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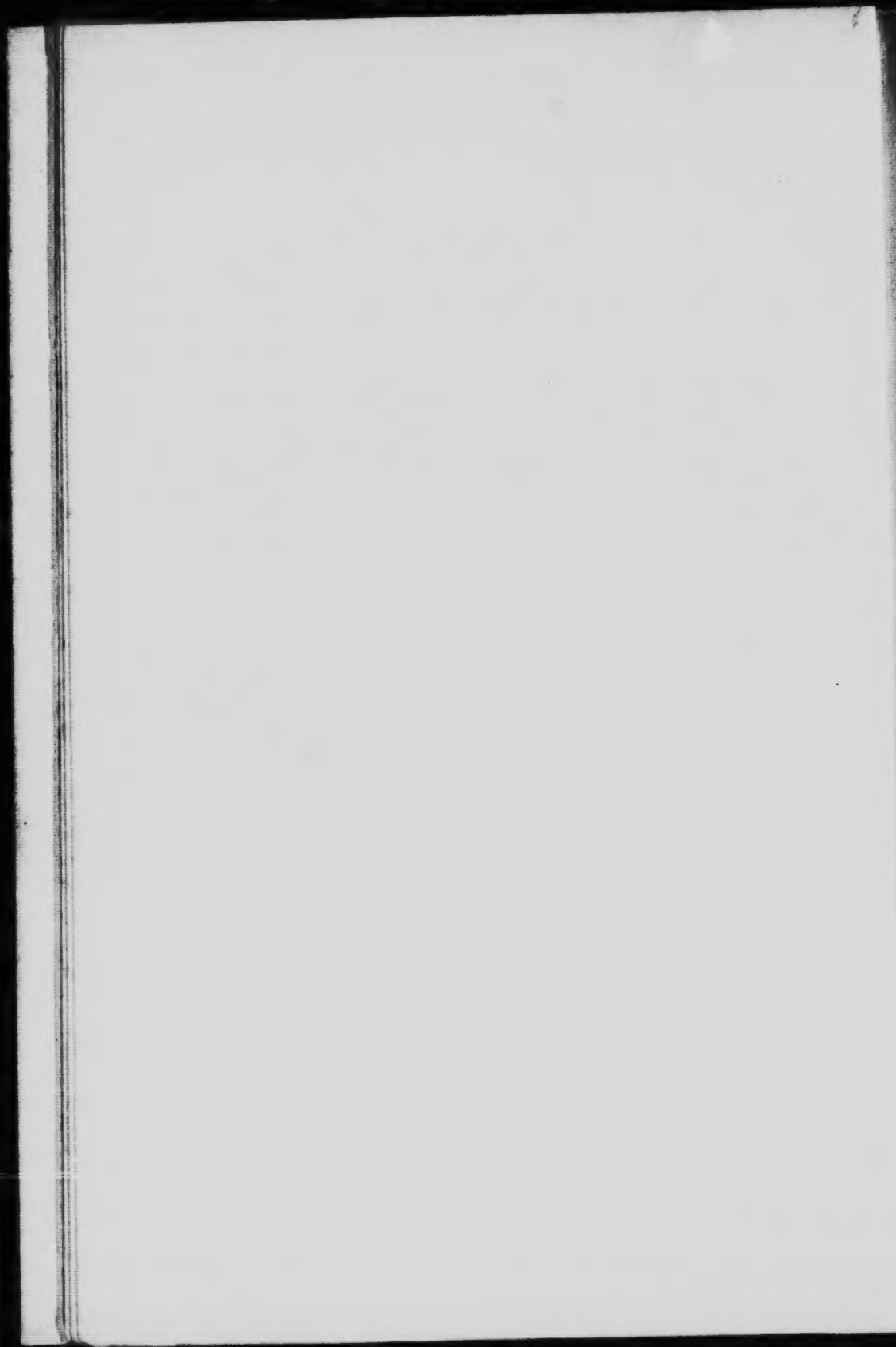
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FOREWORD

THIS history is no mere effort of fancy. Those who play their part in it were many of them real enough, living their lives, with their loves and their hates, their struggles and troubles, in and about the old town of Rippon. Such were Sir Ninian Markenfield, the Canons of Monkton, Studley and Stanwick, Edmund Brown, the Wakeman, and persons of less consequence. I trust I have done them no injustice in my interpretation of the records that exist; but are not the most faithful of historians liable to error when they search into motives or guess at particulars?

For the avoidance of archæological inaccuracy I have had the assistance of Mr. John Whitham, lately of Ripon, whose kindness in reading through these pages, when in manuscript, I gratefully acknowledge.



JOCK O' RIPPON

CHAPTER I

THE CANON'S WIFE

IN the little chamber over the Bridge Chapel of Hewick, near Rippon, the wind shrieked through the unglazed windows, and the roar of the flood rose and fell with it. In the flurry of waters booming past the piers there was a chuckle of triumph flung back to the room above, where a straight figure lay on the truckle-bed under the covering. By it crouched a burly priest in prayer, whilst the gusts stirred the coverlet and water dripped from the bed to the floor. The Churchman had uncovered the dead woman's face, and looking long into the half-closed eyes, had stooped to the cold lips with a soul-wrung cry, afterwards with lingering touch straightening out the wet black tresses. But at the sound of steps on the winding stair he rose hastily to his feet, and, so far as might be, smoothed the sorrow out of his face.

The man who entered wore a frayed monkish habit, greasy and glittering with fish-scales, girt to his waist by a piece of rope; his bald head, with its

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thick red fringe of hair, showed a round fat face, now marked with concern and deference.

"I hope I did right, Sir Christopher, in summoning you?"

The portly Canon drew himself up stiffly, but had difficulty in controlling the emotion in his voice.

"You did well, but—but how did you know?"

"It was the boy. The boy said, 'Take me to Sir Christopher Draglea, mummy says so.'"

The Canon started. "The boy?"

"Ay, there's a boy. I found him looking down into the river by the broken parapet, where the last flood struck the bridge with a floating tree. St. Anthony forgive me, I had scant time for repairing it. He stood there, I say, crying for his mother, who had 'jumped down into the big black hole,' said he."

"Tell me again just how it happened."

The Bridge Hermit came farther into the room, and spoke in a low, husky tone, with pitiful glances at the truckle-bed.

"I was below bridge, where I had left eel-lines in the deep pools; the river was running high, and I feared they might be swept away. All at once came a great wave; in a few moments the waters rose half a fathom, and in the meadows, where I stood on the bank, I was knee-deep in them. As I turned to run for dry ground, there was a shriek from the bridge, and in the deepening gloom something flashed white into the flood. Thinking it to be some poor creature

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drowning fast, I ran to the shallows at the bend to give him a helping hand. But coming there I saw a bundle of clothes rolled and tumbled helplessly along in an eddy of the deeper water, out of reach. When about to risk all in a dash through the boiling waters, the swirl of the eddy threw the bundle up at my feet. Quick was I to lift and drag it to higher ground, and then hoisting it upon my shoulder, to carry it up into this room. Here I sought to bring her—for it was a woman—back to life, but all I could do was naught. And so, seeing she was already sped, poor soul, I went out to the bridge to find out the meaning of other crying and sobbing that I heard, and at the edge of the gulf stood the boy, calling out on his mother 'in the deep black hole.' "

"Where is the boy?" said the Canon, flinging himself into a chair and burying his face in his hands.

"Asleep on the straw in the shed, where I keep my bridge tools. This was no place to bring him, where his mother lay dead. When I asked him who they were, he said they were mother and little Jock going to see the great Canon of St. Wilfrid's, whose name was Sir Christopher Draglea. He had his lesson pat from his mother. Then, Sir Christopher, I could do naught but come to you; a dead woman's bidding, I thought."

While he spoke, the Canon was groaning heavily

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and wringing his hands. But when the Hermit stopped, he raised his huge bulk from the chair and towered massive and solid over the other, sturdy though he was too. And suddenly he took him by the shoulders, and forced him into the chair from which he had himself risen, and said in a thick voice, which rose high and quavered with emotion :

"Sit you there, Matthew, and be my confessor."

Thereupon the Hermit, in wonder and dismay, strove to rise, whilst Sir Christopher pressed him back.

"Nay, Sir Christopher, let another, worthier than I, do this office; one of the Canons, or even the Abbot of Fountains himself. I am but a poor hermit, and even so, none too holy."

"Because of your very unworthiness, Matthew Hermit, you shall hear my confession. I will take no denial. Here, in her presence, I will humble myself to the dust before you, miserable and mean as you are. Ay, mean and ragged and dirty you are, and, as you rightly say, by common report none too holy in your office; but so much the better. You, the Bridge Hermit, shall know and scorn the littleness of the great Treasurer of the Church of St. Peter and St. Wilfrid. You shall hear what the President of the Chapter now bitterly repents; and it may be that she there may have pity on me and forgive."

After that the Hermit could do or say no more, but sat trembling, and Sir Christopher knelt before

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him on the foul pea-straw, with head bowed to his knees, almost touching the cold, soaked figure of the woman on the bed in that little room.

"She was my wife," he groaned, "before I was a priest. My father lived far up Nidderdale, possessed of a few hides of moorland, and there were five sons to get a bare sustenance out of his barren estate. I was his youngest, wayward and impatient, and must needs wed with Elfrida without further waiting; and she was carried away by my hot haste. Out on the moor from a hungry plot of my father's land I toiled to win existence for us two and the child that was born; and in grinding poverty my wife and I agreed not so well. Then came news that the Scot was raiding the North, and I was glad to be called to follow Sir Ninian Markenfield's banner with the men of Rippon, whilst my wife and child took refuge in my father's house. I was a good man-at-arms, and prided myself on my strength of body and skill with sword and pike. It was my good hap to stand over Sir Ninian when he was beaten down in his too rash advance, fending off a crowd of foes who turned upon him. After that we became as sworn brothers, he being by little my elder.

"When we returned from the glorious victory of Flodden, he could not rest till he had done something to better my condition. The Canon of Monkton's stall in St. Wilfrid's Church, with its prebend lands, had fallen vacant. Sir Ninian had much favour with

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the Chapter, the Archbishop, and even at Rome itself. The Canonry was mine, said he, if I would but take Holy Orders. I was tempted, but to be honest, must put away my wife."

He was silent for a while, and the Hermit, thinking that some word from him was expected, stammered out :

"But, Sir Christopher——"

The Canon raised his head angrily.

"But me no buts, Hermit. Listen to my tale and spare me your base-born comments. Think you——" He broke off, contrition overcoming pride. "Say what you will," he murmured, stretching out his arms piteously to the corpse. "I will hear all, bear all humbly, if I may but win pardon from thy pure spirit." And to the Hermit again :

"She, like myself, was weary of the fight with care and misery. She would, yet again, before the fatal step was taken, would not, and in the end fell on her knees to me. Better, said she, all our lives to be poor, if but unparted. But I, by thinking much on them, was now mad to get riches and advancement. Half my yearly incoming should be hers, said I; the boy and she should live on a little farm that I would buy in Knaresborough Forest. Thus I persuaded her against her will; and I became Canon of St. Wilfrid's and Treasurer of the Chapter. Still higher ambition had I, for there was no end to the Lord of Markenfield's love and gratitude to his pre-

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erver. He, and he alone, knew of my wife, for my father died, and of my brothers two had fallen at Flodden and other two were far away fighting in the Italian wars, and, for my neighbours in the wilds of Upper Nidderdale, they were few and little likely to know the Canon for Kit Draglea, Yeoman of Middlesmoor. . . . So we parted. From the day I put on the priest's alb she became no wife of mine. She lived alone with the child on the little farm, and I never saw her again. A se'nnight ago she sent me a messenger, and this was her missive: 'My life is a bare, cold desert, with but one flower blossoming in it, even my boy, and he needs a father's strong hand. Yet, how can I give him to you?'

"It was a matter for thought, look you, a matter for much thought, before I could send back word, and meanwhile——"

"She was coming to bring him to you," broke in the Hermit, wagging his head; "she was coming; or could it be that her sorrows were too sore for her, and that she leapt willingly into the flood?"

A great cry burst from the Canon.

"Say not so, Matthew Hermit. The fear of that has gripped my heart like ice. No, no!" he continued vehemently, "I will not believe it. She was bringing him to me. Say it was so, man," he insisted angrily, shaking the Hermit by the sleeve.

"Nay, I know not," replied the other dully. "It might be so and again it might not."

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"God forgive me, if it be so," said the Canon brokenly, "and God forgive me, too, if it be not, for I tried her sore by my hardheartedness. She would forgive me, dear heart, an she knew. I would even exchange offices with you, Hermit, for one word out of those dumb lips."

Whilst he bowed in a fresh burst of agony, turning to the still figure, the Hermit rose noiselessly from his chair and descended the stair, leaving the Canon forgetful of all but his grief and his loss. In the little chapel below he waited, and ere long sounded the slow, heavy tread of the Canon, with much dolorous moaning and sighing, till at the foot of the stair he was met by the Hermit. Then the Canon said :

"She shall lie in Church Close. I will send men with her bier. She shall have Christian burial. See to it, Master Hermit."

And so they went to the pentice at the back, and there, on a heap of straw, lay a little lad, with close curls, who, roused by the noise of their coming, showed eyes of the same blue as those which shone fiercely in the Canon's face. And looking to the Hermit, the boy said :

"Hast tha' brought the great Canon, as tha' saidst tha' wouldst?"

And the Hermit replied, "Ay, 'tis the Canon, Sir Christopher, your——" and stopped short.

But the Canon, taking him up briskly, put in,

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"your uncle. Ay, I am your uncle, boy." And the Hermit, with a smile on his broad face, nodded and murmured, "Ay," to that.

"Ay, boy, he is your uncle."

Then the boy got up, and putting his hand into the Canon's great paw, said with a sleepy yawn :

"I must go and live with you, mummy said." But memory coming back to him, his lips quivered as he looked about him.

"But where is my mummy? Will she come back from the black hole?"

And the Hermit, out of the goodness of his heart, was quick to say, "Your mother has gone home for a while, laddie, but she will come back."

Then looking at Sir Christopher, who had turned his back on them, his great shoulders shaking with grief, the Hermit said :

"If she come not back, she will send for you, and you shall see her again," and with that contented him.

And so the little lad went hand-in-hand with Sir Christopher down the road. But they had not gone far when a frown came on the Canon's face, and bidding the boy await him, he strode back to where the Hermit stood in the doorway of the chapel watching them, and gripping him by the shoulder the Canon flared at him :

"Listen to me, Master Hermit. Not a word of this abroad. If I hear of your tongue clacking, by

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the God that made me, I will break you, Hermit—I'll have you cast out of your hermitage." And whilst the Hermit shrank away in amazement, Sir Christopher had gone over the bridge and along the road with the boy.

Thus the Canon gat a nephew, and little Jock came to dwell in the Prebend House of Monkton at Rippon.

CHAPTER II

THE VOYAGE OF THE *HOLY CROSS*

IN a desert corner of the Moor's land black tents cast lengthening shadows on a yellow, stony waste. Within a flight-shot shone a sea of shimmering blue. Gently rocking in a creek lay a long galley, a sea-worn crew flung asleep about her benches. On land one red-capped seaman alone restlessly paced the strip of shingle. The scrunch of pebbles beneath his tread, the break of wavelets on the beach, the clank of a rower's leg-chain, the rise and fall of muffled voices within a tent some little distance apart from the others: these were sounds that broke the stillness of the afternoon.

The shipman ashore glanced from the westering sun to the tent, letting his eyes rest on it in anger: then with an impatient curse kicked a stone out of his path.

"Azrael smite all unbelievers! A fair wind lost while the Reis amuses himself with this Kafir!"

As he spoke, the hair-woven sides of the tent shook and swayed, the mutterings within it rose to a scream, and a man staggered out into the white sunlight with starting eyeballs and slobbering mouth;

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then lurching a few steps, threw his arms abroad and fell on his face.

Close behind him came a Moor with a ragged beard and a fierce, glad look, who beckoned to the shipman now running up, and between them they turned the fallen man upon his back. Thus lying, he moaned weakly, tossing his blistered, restlessly twitching face from side to side, past heeding his two tormentors, when they spurned him with their sea-boots and spat at him. The boatswain, turning to the black-bearded Reis, said, whilst he touched the knife in his belt :

"Time to make an end, master. Thy vengeance has been sweet, no doubt, but none too brief."

The Moor shook his head grimly.

"Allah be praised for his servants, the burning sun and the maddening hashish ! They have wrought well for me, but the end is not yet, nor for many a long day of torture for him."

"What hast thou done to him?" asked the boatswain.

The other was silent for a few moments, eyeing with keen relish the writhings of his victim, and then said slowly :

"It was mid-day when we brought him back from the hollow, the sun-blistered hollow, where is no breath of air, and the flies—ha, ha ! you know what the flies are like, Mahmoud, if you smear a man's head and neck with honey. Allah ! how he prayed

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to his God and then raved in his agony, until his madness passed into a swoon. Then we brought him up into the tent, where, senseless as he was, I could work my will on his white body. Afterwards I revived him and brought his senses back to him with drugs. These things are easy, Mahmoud, when you are skilled in medicine. So his mind cleared and he could understand and remember what I told him."

"And then?"

"Why, then you heard him cry out, and saw him rush from the tent."

"And what said you that he should shriek, as though he had fallen to the bottom of Eblis?"

"I? Why, nothing but what had happened. That down in the hollow he had cursed his God—see, that is his God, hanging round his neck, he on the cross—and his God's mother, when the sun was shrivelling up his brains. Thrice I repeated to him his curses. Inshallah! he shall not forget. And I showed him my handiwork on his body, what I did when he was in his swoon. See here. He shall carry his reminder ever with him." El Hakim stooped and drew back the shirt from the senseless man's breast, disclosing the fair whiteness of it and the marks upon the skin.

The renegade Greek boatswain looked close while laughter shook his sides. "By the Prophet! a merry conceit. Thou hast well said and hast cunningly

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carved him. Yet why be at so much trouble for this son of a burnt father? Death ends all."

"He shall not die but remember."

The boatswain shook his head. "With such madness in his brain, he must. A whole day this folly has kept us idle. Strike, and have done."

"He shall not die," replied the Moor in sudden wrath, "for others of our foes the swift mercy of a scimitar's edge, but not for the son of his father. I had a son, too, the apple of my eye. This man's father slew him. What then? Does a brave man look for mercy from his foe in battle? But that accursed sea-robber sent me my son's bleeding corpse wrapped in a Jewish gaberdine, a foul pig's foot crammed between his teeth, to pollute his soul after death, and his legs burnt off, that even in Paradise his body might be mutilated. Should his son, then, have an easy death?"

The boatswain spat again in the face of the madman at his feet.

"Bury him in the sand to his neck and let the sun dry up what is left of his brain."

"There is a better way than that. He shall live—with that," pointing to his victim's bared breast. "I have dwelt in captivity with these Christians and know their foolishness. Moreover, I have looked into this man's soul. When he dies, as die he must some day, I shall mourn like his own brother, for then his father's soul, looking out

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of hell at his son's torture, will have rest. But while he lives I will daily offer thanks to Allah for my daily vengeance. Call Ahmed and Hassan to carry him to the galley. Let them drench his head with cool sea water. With that and the soothing medicines that I have, I will bring him back to life and understanding."

* * * * *

The master of the *Holy Crosse* looked forth from the high poop with a frown upon his brow, his eyes fixed on the pursuing barque, with its long low shape and lateen sail, growing larger every moment. The owner stood anxious at his elbow.

Under safe conduct of the Turk, the *Holy Crosse* had trafficked to Candie, Chios and the Levant, coming scathless through all the dangers of the deep, unmolested by Moslem galleass or Barbary xebec. She had traded her kerseys and cottons for silk and cinnamon, for malmsey and muscatel. Now on her return, with the Straits behind, the Bay of Portugal ahead, she was passing out of the range of the swift foists of the Barbary corsairs which preyed on the trade routes of the Mediterranean.

After that the lesser perils of English pirate or French privateer became light matters to a stout ship well fenced with ammunition and a lion-hearted crew of forty-three. The hopes of the owner had risen

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high. The rich cargo in the hold would soon be fetching fivefold, perhaps even tenfold his adventure, when he came to the port of Hull. Then had been sighted the white speck, which grew and lengthened to a swift galley crowded with men.

The merchant adventurer of Hull spoke to the master at his side.

"Is she a King of Spain's ship, think you?"

The master shook his head.

"John Lyly, the master gunner, says he knows her well. And reason for it. But two years gone he pulled an oar in the *Gazal*, chain on leg, and if, says he, El Hakim is her captain, then are we in hard case, and may look for scimitar edge or rowing bench every soul. The wind is fast dropping to a calm. With her oars she can come aboard us when and where she will, and yonder sails low on the horizon are doubtless her consorts within call."

"Out on you and Lyly for Job's comforters! I will not believe that this fair venture, which has so far prospered, can fail, when all but achieved. We shall yet win safe to the haven of Hull."

Some of the mariners were crowding the ship's side in the forecastle and the waist, others whetted their Sheffield blades, bill and halberd at the grindstone: the master gunner and his men drove home iron balls into the throats of bombards and demi-culverins. The *Holy Crosse's* mainsail hung limp and wind-empty, but the galley came on with un-

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abated pace, and soon drawing level, held off out of range of their shot.

"The running of the turbaned devils! They fear a ball through their planking before they fasten on us, and so will bide their time, and await their friends yonder, while they worry us from a distance," said the master.

But it soon appeared that the Moors had some other purpose, for not a bolt was fitted to a cross-bow, nor a shot fired against the decks of the *Holy Crosse*. Instead, a flag was spread on the poop of the galley, and her commander, coming forth from beneath his canopy, shouted some words once and again, whilst the rowers kept easy pace with the ship.

"A truce!" muttered the master. "I fear it is but treachery. Yet send me the master gunner, who knows their lingo better than I, and let him interpret what they want of us."

But, in fact, it was soon evident that there was no need of the gunner to interpret, for the galley drawing somewhat near there came from it a cry that could not be mistaken for aught but downright English, distinct enough for every man on board the *Holy Crosse* to understand, although there was an outlandish ring about the sounds that marked the foreigner. And this is what the Moor cried out:

"A truce, Englishmen! We intend you no harm, but would parley with you in peace."

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"The truce ye shall get shall be a shot between wind and water if ye come nearer. What would you have?" shouted the master, and bade his men to stand to their arms, and in no way to relax their guard against any sudden treachery of these English-speaking Moors. "Some renegade, belike," said he. "No devil lives more spiteful than your Christian turned Turk."

"Nay, you are wrong, master," said John Lyly, "it is El Hakim, the Moor, who spoke, and they seem to me to be carrying someone forth from under the canopy."

Again the Moor's ringing voice was heard.

"We have here a countryman of yours, till now held captive. We would deliver him up to you without ransom. Say you, whether we shall come alongside and hand him up to you from our deck, or send him in the skiff, if you still suspect us. See! our bowmen and arquebusiers have cast their weapons at their feet, and so will not take you unawares."

The master laughed in scorn. "We should be gulls indeed to be tricked by so plain a snare," he said to the owner. "They outnumber us five to one, and in a moment would swarm over our sides if they could come near enough."

"Ye may come aboard us in your boat," he cried to the Moor, "with two only besides yourself and your Englishman, and, for your galley, if it come nigher, we shall fire on you with our bombards."

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Upon that the Reis gave an order to the rowers, and they pulled the galley somewhat farther off, and there was little fear that more should come in their skiff, for it was a mere cock-boat, and with two to row it beside the Moor and the sick man, sat heavily in the water, in danger of sinking, had not a calm prevailed.

And when the captive was lifted over the side by El Hakim's men and the ready hands of the sailors of the *Holy Crosse*, the Englishmen gathered curiously around, not so much to see the famous El Hakim, of whom Lyly had told marvellous tales, as the English prisoner; for that one held captive by Turkish rovers should be given up without ransom they could hardly credit, and the master of the *Holy Crosse* shook his head, as he said to the owner that he had his doubts still that this was some trick which the Moor was putting upon them. For his part he would like to be assured the pretended Englishman was, indeed, such and not rather a Turk disguised.

But El Hakim, who had climbed aboard, and was come up the ladder which leads to the poop, over-hearing the master's words, laughed out :

"You Christians are ever suspicious of us followers of the Prophet. Ye cannot believe that a Mussulman, out of the gentleness of his heart, would have tended this man and now be willing to give him up for naught. Yet to show you that we war not with the sick and those visited by Allah, and still

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less with a beardless captive, a mere boy like this one here, take you these two purses, one to pay his passage to England, the other for himself for his charges, after ye have landed him."

Then catching the eye of Sir Roger Staper, who gave him more friendly glances than did the master, he placed the two purses in his hand, and with them a box containing a white salt like sea-brine.

"It is a powerful medicine," he explained, "and mingled with water for a drink, will cool and quieten a mad man's brain." And so with a salaam was down the side.

But as they moved away in the boat, he stayed the rowers for a while, and raising his face to the Englishmen looking at him over the rail, he said :

"If ye would have him live, be ye careful to carry out with care my instructions. If ye omit a single one it may well be that he will not recover, or, if he regain his bodily strength, his mind may remain in darkness, so that he forget the past, even the kindness that I had towards him, as my own son, that I lost some years since. That would grieve me most of all. Therefore, good sirs, ye will best pleasure me if ye bring him back to memory of all that I have done for him. So will my well-beloved son rest happily in his grave, and I, too, shall be content."

And so they rowed him in the little boat to the galley, and the Englishmen wondered why he laughed and was so merry. But the master sent his

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men to their posts again, and in no way relaxed his vigilance, and when the pilot of the galley put her about and steered so as to run her under the Englishmen's counter, at a word the gunners trained one of the bombards so as to bear upon the Moors in their forecastle, and another threatened the captain's canopy. Yet had they no excuse for firing, since, although they ran so close that a stone might have been cast among the dark-skinned Moors, these stood with arms folded to show they intended no hurt.

And so the galley gathered way and sped back to the Straits. But as they went, El Hakim stood watching the English ship, and when they were closest under the poop of the *Holy Crosse*, he waved his hand in farewell to Sir Roger Staper, and said: "Give the Mocr's last greetings to my poor captive, and loose not the bandages on his breast, where he was wounded, for at least a day and a night; then look, and the sight will pleasure you and him whom I loved as my son." When he had said this, he laughed again, and they saw his white teeth glistening from his dark face.

"This man hath something of Christian charity in him," said the owner. "Heard you his fair words? And his dealing with us has agreed therewith."

"I like not the pagan nor his words," grumbled the master, spitting over the side.

"But you saw the kindness in his face when he last spoke?"

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The master scowled. "Ay, he smiled like a fiend that has done some devil's deed. Yet in what he has bested us would be hard to say."

"Now we must look to his captive," said the owner, and led the way to his cabin.

Now the sick man had said never a word, when two of the shipmen carried him drooping between them into the cabin and laid him there on the owner's bed, as he had directed; but as Sir Roger and the master stood looking down on him, he began to mutter and to turn restlessly on the couch, and suddenly called out that hellish eyes were on him, burning up his soul, and it took the two of them to hold him down, though wasted with fever, with such frenzy did he struggle. At last Sir Roger, be-
thinking him of the white salt which El Hakim had given him with the purses, dropped a portion of it into a cup of water, although the master told him to throw the infidel's poison into the sea. And the sick man, seeing the cup, in the fever of his thirst, snatched it from the owner's hand and drained it to the last drop. And whilst the master, watching, looked to see him fall dead at their feet, the sick man's clenched fists opened, and his eyes, losing their madness, closed drowsily, so that before long he sank into a quiet slumber.

It was the first time that they had seen his twitching face still, and the owner said to the master that he was naught but a handsome boy to look upon,

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and that from his dress he surmised he was some clerk or churchman.

But the master replied sourly : "I feel it in my bones that ill will come from his presence here. Can we even be sure he is a Christian man and not some fiendish Turk brought aboard to do us a mischief, and thus dressed to act his part?"

The owner lifted a wet cloth that lay on the head of the sleeping man.

"See! he has the tonsure of a monk. That he is a Christian there can be no doubt." Then the two left the youth to his sleep in the cabin.

Coming forth they found the mainsail flapping idly against the mast, and the master, glancing aloft and ahead, started in dismay; then putting hand to mouth he shouted an order that set the crew running to the sails.

A black cloud had arisen low down in the northwest, and was rapidly overcasting the sky, while the sea beneath it whitened under a distant roaring squall, and much ado had they to furl the sails and make all taut before the gale burst upon them. Now the sick man had been aboard a short hour when the gale struck the ship.

All that night her planks groaned and the cordage creaked as the wind whistled through it, and had she not been stout in her oaken sides, and her crew skilled mariners, surely they had gone down in that boisterous sea.

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When the next morning broke, the fierceness of the storm had somewhat abated, but still it blew from the north, so that they had to beat up slowly against it. In the night one had been washed overboard, and one lay with a fallen yard across his back. In that estate were they for the next three days, striving to make headway, and yet in all beating but a league or so. Through all that time the sick man lay in the cabin still and pale the day long until the evening, and when the night came he would shriek and rave and struggle, until the owner gave him of the Moor's medicine. But each day the fits became less violent, and on the fourth day, after a deep sleep, he awoke in his right mind, though of little strength of body.

But now misfortune of a different kind fell upon the unhappy ship, for two of the crew sickened, and one of these died suddenly before night in such wise that all knew they had on board the deadly plague of the East.

Then Sir Roger Staper, who alone was accounted something of a leech, had his hands full, putting men to scrub and clean the ship and to fill her hold with the smoke from burning cauldrons of pitch to stay the pestilence, if they might. Thus neither he nor the master had leisure to look to the patient in the cabin.

But suddenly remembering some hours after noon that for a long time he had not been tended with food

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or drink, the master sent John Lyly to the cabin to care for his wants.

And the gunner entering, found the man sitting wearily on his bed, and trying to rise, but having no strength to support himself, and when he saw Lyly, instead of asking for food or drink, he said :

"Have ye anywhere a mirror?"

"Why, there is one in your hand," said the other in surprise, knowing it for one that had hung at the foot of Sir Roger's bed.

"But I need a second."

Then Lyly, thinking a sick man's whim must be humoured, brought him another, like that he had, from the master's cabin hard by, and pretending to go away, watched him through the door. And first the stranger turned his back upon the light from the door, and threw open his shirt. Then taking one mirror in his right hand, and the other in his left, he so held them that the right hand one reflected himself, and was reflected itself in the other.

Wondering at that, Lyly crept nearer, and looking over his shoulder into the right hand mirror, he saw the white breast of the man there pictured, and on it letters largely written in blue, with the skin standing up round them red and angry.

But the gunner could make nothing of the writing which was there, for he saw it reversed; but the sick man, looking into the left hand mirror, with a loud shriek, dropped them both, and striking his breast,

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fell back swooning on the bed, with one hand spread over the writing.

And Lyly ran to the medicine which the owner gave when a fit like this came on the stranger, and raising him up, put the cup to his lips, and, as he did so, the man's hand fell away from his breast, so that the gunner could see what was written there. And he, staring for a moment, then let the man fall back, and fled out of the cabin down the poop ladder, calling for the master and the owner, who were busy in the men's quarters.

Running and breathless, he came plump into a group of them as they were tossing into the sea the shrouded corpse of the man who had died of plague, whilst others stood by with bowed heads.

And the owner turned sternly upon the gunner and asked him why he burst thus unseemly upon them whilst doing the last that they could for their unhappy comrade stricken by God.

"'Stricken by God' ye may well say," he replied, "by an angry God, and small wonder if we perish one by one, an we stay in this accursed ship."

"Shame on you, John!" broke in the master angrily, "shame on one who has known and endured the miseries of a Turkish bagnio, so to lose his wits because we have the pestilence among us."

"This is no way to hearten the men to brave the disease," put in the owner, "and you have earned

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the irons from the master here for setting so ill an example."

"Sir," said the gunner, "ye will not talk of irons if ye will look once at the horror in the cabin yonder. Go, I say, and when ye have seen him, tell me if there be not a curse on this ship. Resolve me this. Until seven days since had not this barque a fair and prosperous voyage?"

"She had," came with one voice from the crew.

"And how long had the man yonder boarded us before misfortunes came thick and fast? What first?"

"The squall, ay, the squall!"

"In the squall we lost two of our number. After that the pest, with one man cast black and swollen into the sea, and others ripening to follow. Ay, go and look, master, in the cabin there; and then, if ye have the heart for it, come and put your irons on a man because he warns you of the curse that the *Holy Crosse* has within her bowels, ay, a very Jonah."

Then both Sir Roger and the master would have gone up to the cabin to know what Lyly meant, but before they could do so, a shrill laugh echoed through the ship, which made them pause with their feet upon the lowest rung of the ladder that led to the poop.

And waiting thus, they saw the sick youth stagger forth from the cabin clutching at his throat, and with

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his other hand he caught at the rail near the head of the stair to steady himself, and then stood looking down upon them, laughing horribly without ceasing; and all the crew that were not down with the plague gathered behind the master and the owner and fastened their eyes upon him.

And there, wagging his head at them with a grin that turned his beautiful face into the mask of a fiend, the youth stopped for a little in his laughing, and said breathless and panting, and yet clear and distinct for all to hear:

"Listen, ye fools, listen to me. He that ruleth the world is not God. This is a world in which there be fools and devils only, and the devils rule. Therefore, let us serve our Prince the Devil; and shout, shout, you fools, for your master the Devil and my master. Look, here is his livery; I have his mark," and he rent his shirt in rags, standing bare but for his hose before them. At that moment the sun, passing from behind a cloud, cast a level ray of red light from the west upon his bare breast, and all of them saw the writing on it.

Shuddering at the blasphemy of the broken figure, which shook and swayed above them, and shuddering still more at the horror on his breast, which the gunner hoarsely interpreted to them, crossing himself the while, and asking pardon of the Virgin for his unwilling wickedness, they turned their backs upon him to shut out the ghastly sight,

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pressing their fingers to their ears that they might not hear those impious words.

Within an hour the steersman brought them as near as he safely might to the Portugal shore, and two, chosen by lot, since all were loath, went in the ship's boat with the dreadful stranger, and rowing him ashore, they left him with food and wine and his two purses in his bosom.

Then the ship lost her head and the wind came fair, pointing to the north. And after that no man died of the plague, and they that had been sick quickly grew well; and so the *Holy Crosse* came home to the haven of Hull.

But Sir Roger Staper was much exercised in mind what to do, since on the rosary which the Moors had left on the body of their mutilated captive he had seen the inscription, "W. Mallory." In the end, being ill-satisfied with the casting out of the *Holy Crosse's* Jonah, he took no measures to discover who this "W. Mallory" might be.

CHAPTER III

THE DEATH OF RALPH OF CLOTHERAM TOWER

RALPH OF CLOTHERAM, who had been many things in turn—merchant adventurer, pirate and foreign mercenary in the pay of Portugal and Spain—in the brief intervals when he was at home hated and feared by his neighbours as a wild and ruthless man, now lay a-dying in his tower of Clotheram, near to the town of Rippon.

His haggard, scarred face was marked with the approach of death, but still a flicker of his fiery nature shot up from time to time as he turned his eyes impatiently to the door, listening intently for sounds from the outside, or muttering angrily to Sir Ninian, his neighbour of Markenfield, who sat in a high-backed chair by the bed. On the other side crouched a lank-limbed, overgrown girl, with black brows, and eyes in which were deep smouldering fires, her hair rough and tousled spreading over her shoulders.

"The knave should be here," Clotheram panted. "I dispatched him in good time—knowing how it was going with me. He should be here with the parchments—many hours ago."

Sir Ninian moved in an uncomfortable way. He

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had been summoned to Clotheram the night before by an urgent message that surprised him and yet could not be denied. Old Ralph might need him as a neighbour of weight and consequence to witness a will. Therefore, late as it was, he had ridden at once from Markenfield to Clotheram.

But there he found a dying man, incapable of expressing his wishes; and compelled by a sense of duty, he had waited through the long night listening to his ravings, and hoping for some return of sanity. When at last, in the early morning, the fever ebbed and the sick man came back to his right mind, so weak and breathless was he that it was some time before he could whisper the matter for which he had summoned the knight. Long ere this Sir Ninian had reached a state of horror and curiosity.

In his own lifetime he had seen much violence, and had waded deep in blood at Flodden, where, fifteen years before, Rippon men had fought under his banner, but the cold ferocity of desperate deeds revealed in the night ravings of the old adventurer surpassed anything that Sir Ninian had seen or conceived, and fully justified the doubtful reputation and the fear in which Ralph Clotheram had been held in the country round.

At last, regaining possession of his senses, the dying man had succeeded in gasping out his message to Sir Ninian, one that surprised him more than the summons to his deathbed. For this swashbuckling

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old ruffian, who had cut throats in the service of Spain and Portugal, feared and disliked by all his neighbours, and of little consideration amongst them, offered the hand of his only daughter to Sir Ninian's son; and the offer had taken away Sir Ninian's breath.

As the person of greatest consequence in or around the Liberty of Rippon, outside the great Abbey, and in spite of the growing pretensions of the Mallorys, he could hardly credit his ears, and had not the proposal been made by one who had done with life, he would straightway have rudely turned his back upon him, treating such an offer as an affront, for he had ambitious plans for the next head of the house of Markenfield.

But the tale which followed with many pauses, whilst old Clotheram fought for breath, made him think twice before giving a proud refusal, and a little more thought induced him to accept with suppressed eagerness on certain terms.

As those terms required the return of the messenger that Clotheram, with knowledge of his approaching end, had sent three days before to Hull, Sir Ninian was as impatient as the dying man for his arrival, now many hours overdue.

At times Sir Ninian glanced anxiously at the sick man's face, trying to reckon the moments of life left to him, and relieved by the energy of his angry exclamations at the tarrying of the rider, an anger in

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some measure kept in check by the presence of the chantry priest of Clotheram, who some hours before had administered the viaticum. The sick man thrust out a wasted claw and plucked at Sir Ninian's sleeve, drawing his ear down to his lips.

"Hark ye! There will be the wardship to buy of the Archbishop without delay. Have you the money ready?"

Sir Ninian answered cautiously: "It will be hard to find a sufficient sum. Have you a store here from which you can aid me?"

"Nay," replied the other, sinking back. "There's naught here. You must find it yourself. And it is worth doing."

But Sir Ninian hardly heard what he said. He was listening to a faint sound that came in at the window, the thud of hastening hoofs growing louder each moment, and with relief on his face he said:

"Your rider comes, and is even now at the outer door."

The adventurer's face lighted up, and he strained his eyes in eager expectation across the room.

"'Tis none too soon," he whispered, "I am well-nigh sped."

A few moments more, and a man, booted and spurred, threw open the door and strode without hesitation across the room to thrust a packet into the hands of Ralph of Clotheram.

"Blame me not, master," he said, "my horse

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foundered after York and lost me hours before I could get another. The merchant at Hull said I must take this straight to you though you be at your last breath."

And old Ralph, seizing the packet, broke the seal with difficulty, and then, beckoning to the chapel priest to draw nigh, he placed in his hands one parchment that he drew from the packet, saying :

"Give it to the lass when she comes of age," and thrusting the other upon Sir Ninian, with a chuckle, that passed into a rattle, fell dead upon his bed.

CHAPTER IV

SIR NINIAN MARKENFIELD'S PLOTS AND PERPLEXITIES

THE chase had ended at Quarry Moor, and the stag lay bleeding amid the golden gorse.

The Canon rose from wiping his hunting knife on a tuft of grass, whilst Jock o' Rippon held off the hounds.

The Lady Bertha, flushed and breathless, and Sir Ninian, less active than the Canon, though of equal age, looked sideways from their horses, till Sir Christopher replaced the knife in his belt.

"The best we can do for the poor beast. A clean cut and a speedy quittance. And no bungling by another," he added, as he lifted his great body into the saddle.

Sir Ninian stood up in his stirrups and swept the horizon.

"No sign of Staveley and his boys," he chuckled. "Bogged to his girths he was on Pillmoor, and cried: 'Pull me out, Ned. Pull, Tom, you young coxcomb.' But when I looked back last, they were still pulling and he floundering."

"I thought he knew the hardway better," said the Canon, laughing at the recollection.

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"Doubtless he has given up the chase and gone home. There's the stag, Kit, bred in the Archbishop's park, which His Grace's park-keeper invited us to hunt with him. But where's the park-keeper? By the Lord, a jest against him for a year! You and I and your boy, and with, a girl of fifteen years! and the park-keeper and his boys foundered; beaten by a fifteen-year-old lass!"

"Sixteen years, an it please you," was the sharp correction of the long-limbed, black-browed girl on the nag.

"Fifteen, I say," replied the knight with a snap and a frown.

"And I say sixteen, come three days, on St. Wilfrid's Feast, and as proper a woman as many a one at twenty."

Sir Ninian stared at her with his mouth fallen and rapped out an oath, but the Canon roared with delight.

"She's right, Ninian, she has grown apace since you took her to Markenfield. Three inches I marked on your door-post only this morning. A buxom maid!"

"Rather a wild baggage, pert beyond her years," said Sir Ninian, biting his glove moodily; then seeing the eye of the Canon upon him, he threw off ill-humour and said jovially:

"Staveley being laggard, the stag is plainly forfeit, one moiety to Chapter and one to Markenfield,

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since we be midway. Nay, Chapter shall have Markenfield's share too. Take it to Prebend House, Kit."

The Prebendary murmured reluctance, but the knight would not be denied.

"It shall be so, Canon. St. Wilfrid's Feast is but three days off. There will be many a caller at the Prebend House that will not say nay to venison pasty. Let Jock sling it across his nag. And since 'tis a taller stag than I have seen this season, you must even dismount yourself, Jock, and go on foot to Rippon."

The girl laughed wickedly. "He will be safer on ground, Sir Christopher; God knoweth, it was luck brought him so far in the saddle. No doubt, 'tis why he ever runneth about the country like a bare-legged Scotsman."

The strapping fellow in green doublet that showed signs of hard wear, slid from the saddle, casting a sour look at the shrewish maiden, and then turned with a shrug of the shoulders and a disdainful grunt to his task, at which he made little ado, of lifting and throwing across his horse a burden under which most men would have staggered.

The Churchman, with a laugh, shook his finger at the girl.

"Fie! Lady Bertha. Leave Jock alone. He runs on foot to please himself, for there be few nags he cannot out-tire in a day's journey."

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But still the maiden jeered. "A strong knave, no doubt. We must look among our footmen and serving-men at Clotheram to match him. What say you, Sir Christopher? A wager I find me in the country, if not from Sir William Mallory's men or Sir Ninian's, one with stout enough legs to run a match against your Jock from Clotheram Tower to St. Wilfrid's Church and back again."

The Prebendary tried to frown, but only broke into a hearty laugh at her insolence in matching his nephew with serving-men.

"Mock away, Mistress Malapert. Jock cares not for gibes from wenches, but Heaven save the man who shall put a jest upon him."

His young kinsman, busy in disposing the burden on the horse, seemed not to hear, and muttering, "Then I'll be making forward to Rippon," started the heavily-laden horse by striking him over the haunch with the flat of the hand, and without turning his head, strode after it.

"Late though it be, and well past the hour for dinner at Markenfield," said Sir Ninian, "before we part, Canon, I must have a word with you which the chase had wellnigh put out of my mind."

Sir Christopher groaned. "An ill time to choose, coming between a man and his meat. But if the matter may not wait, ride with me to St. Annesgate to take a snack there. We can talk as we jog along, and conclude your business over a cup of wine."

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Sir Ninian mused with his eye on Bertha. "Ay, we will take pot-luck with you, Canon, and as we pass through Skellgate we can find a messenger to warn Dame Eleanor not to expect us before sunset; and we will hear your vicar sing Vespers in the church ere we return."

"Skellgate? By Bondgate is more direct."

The knight looked meaningly at the Canon. "Bertha here shall go by Bondgate with Jock and tell your people to make ready for us, whilst you and I ride round by Esil Brig, talking as we go."

The Canon nodded. He saw that Sir Ninian would be rid of the girl for a while.

But she, pulling her horse's head round, said eagerly :

"I will to Markenfield ahead of you, Sir Ninian, and take your message. 'Tis a short mile."

"No, no," said the knight, "come back, girl. I will have no ward of mine running agate without attendance. And hark you, Bertha," continued Sir Ninian, "follow Jock to Bondgate Brig and bid him call at the Grammar School for that scant-o'-grace of mine, young Dick. He must leave his musty books and join us at the Prebend House, where we will be jolly with the Canon."

"As for Dick," he continued, after the girl had ridden off, "as for Dick, I would he had more red blood in him like your Jock, and a dash of his spirit. Books be very well in their way, and a lad must

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know something of Greek in these days to be in the fashion at Court, but for my part, give me one with a love of field sports like your Jock."

"And yet Jock has some letters too."

"None too much," laughed the knight. "If your mind is set on turning him into a clerk, Canon, you have your work cut out, wilful man though you be. Ay, you cannot rule all, tho' you rule the Chapter, as they and even the Archbishop himself know full well."

The Canon smiled grimly. "My will is not that Jock should follow his uncle."

Sir Ninian laughed outright. "Uncle, say you? Why keep up that pretence before me? What need for it at all? No shame to you that you were a soldier before you were a Churchman, a father before you wore the tonsure, your wife that was, being now dead, God rest her soul. Had it not been so, old friend, I should not be riding with you now, but my bones had been mouldering in the pit on Flodden Field."

"Flodden is a long way back, and folks forget," returned the Canon.

"That will not I, nor be an ingrate."

"You have more than paid for that little service on the battlefield, Ninian. The Prebend and the Canonry I owe to your interest with His Grace of York, rich guerdon for a stroke or so in a comrade's defence."

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"Well, well, I have given the Chapter their master," chuckled the knight. "And if you choose to call your son your nephew to avoid scandal in Rippon——"

"I have the highest authority in the Church for so doing," said Sir Christopher, finishing the sentence for him with much apparent gravity.

Sir Ninian looked puzzled for a moment, searching for the Canon's meaning, for he was not over-quick of wit, yet seeing a smile breaking on the other's face, he began to laugh, but quickly checked himself and tried to look severe, being a staunch upholder of the Old Church.

"Tut, tut! It ill becomes you to speak evil of dignities, even if the Borgias were——"

"*Mea culpa*," murmured the Canon with pretended penitence. "I but sought to justify myself."

"'Tis your own affair," rejoined Sir Ninian hastily, "and you must do as you please. But here we are nearing Skellgate, and not a word of the matter that lies heavy on my mind."

"I would wager it has to do with the Lady Bertha and young Dick."

"How you guess that is passing strange."

"Not so strange. For the last month, whenever we have met, it has been ever Bertha and Dick, Dick and Bertha, and I have cast about in my mind to solve two several riddles."

"And they are?"

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"Firstly, why you should wish to bring together fire and water. Secondly, why you should be in a fume and a fret about it now."

"To your secondly, I would answer first, that the girl will be sixteen on St. Wilfrid's Day, tho' I tried to pass it off with her just now, and of age to enter upon her estates. Then my wardship and control of her marriage ceasing, someone may snap her up, and the three hundred pounds with which I bought the wardship from the Archbishop had as well been thrown into the Skell. And to your firstly—to your firstly——"

"Ay, to my firstly, what of that?"

"I would say, there are the lands, good lands, that would round off Markenfield."

"Ay, the lands, none too good lands, smothered in stones, that would not round off Markenfield, for Mallory comes between, and the monks too. Bethink you of a better reason than that."

Sir Ninian fidgeted in his saddle and looked at the Canon out of the corner of his eye.

"A plague on you, Canon. You are too cunning for a simple soldier. This comes of taking to the Church."

"Come, out with it if you would have my counsel. There is something at the back of this."

The knight looked round and dropped his voice.

"You are right, Kit. There is something more that the maiden has besides lands, and not a soul

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in the country knows it but myself; at least, so I thought until the last few days."

"What is it that she has?"

"Jewels to the value of twenty thousand crowns, or more, lying with a merchant at Hull."

The Canon laughed silently. "I guessed there was a something, ever since that old scoundrel Ralph Clotheram went to the place prepared for him."

"Hush! Canon. The chantry priest at Clotheram will tell you that he was shriven and made a good end."

"So that was how the old pirate reconciled you to his past villainies and misdoings," said the Canon with the freedom of old friendship, "with his twenty thousand crowns."

"The girl is not to be blamed for her father's misdeeds. Froward, it is true, but she may be schooled out of that, and with a noble marriage portion. . . ."

"With that young Dick can keep up Markenfield in a state that will put to shame all that Mallory can do," said Sir Christopher slyly. "And how did you first find out about the jewels?"

"Clotheram told me when he lay a-dying. He wanted a good settlement for his girl. Now the murder is out."

"I wot well Ralph Clotheram had gotten no wealth out of the stones of his little manor."

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"How he got it is naught to us, but since he got it, and the girl will have it. . . ."

"There is no reason why it should not come to your son to increase the glories of Markenfield," said the Canon, finishing for him.

"Just so, and you will help me to bring this about?"

"If it be possible," said the Canon doubtfully. "This, then, is the mystery that I have seen you brooding over, like a hen on a clutch of eggs. And your neighbours have been wondering, Ninian, why you have not looked higher than Clotheram for a match for your heir. Strange that no one should know of old Ralph's wealth."

"Ah!" said the knight uneasily, "I am not so sure. I misdoubt it may have leaked out, and that is the real matter on which I would have your counsel. I suspect young Mallory knows something."

"Sir William's son? Nay, to my knowledge he is looking elsewhere for a match."

"Not his son, but his nephew, Wilfred, whom they call Mad Mallory, late returned from foreign parts."

"Mad Mallory!" exclaimed the Canon in dismay, "the reckless roysterer called also the Mad Monk, because his uncle would have made him a monk in Fountains Abbey, where he was in his novitiate, till he suddenly left for Spain? Nay, this is another matter. A dangerous man!"

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"Dangerous and cunning," nodded Sir Ninian. "There is a craft underlying his mad acts, I fear. He has been loitering much about Clotheram and putting himself in the way of Bertha."

"But you have taken her into your own keeping at Markenfield."

"Of late, but the mischief may have been done before. Yesterday Mallory rode by and threw a greeting to me, 'Keep your bird safe, sir,' quoth he, 'or someone will open the cage-door.' What say you to that?"

"A jest, it may be."

"I hope so," said the knight doubtfully, "but his father was hand-and-glove with old Clotheram, till he was slain on the high seas, and the son may have got wind of the treasure lying at Hull. The maiden is of age on St. Wilfrid's Day. Then I must in all honesty tell her of the matter, and with nothing settled between her and Dick, my plans may all go agley."

CHAPTER V

THE BAITING OF THE WAKEMAN

As Jock o' Rippon took his way, trudging by the side of his laden horse, came Bertha behind him, in sullen discontent at Sir Ninian's bidding. Thwarted in her secret purpose to ride alone to Markenfield, her rage was looking for an object, no matter what, on which to spend itself.

In such a mood she chose to gallop past Jock, where a muddy pool left by the night's heavy rain lay across the road. As she pulled up her horse she cried over her shoulder:

"Sir Ninian orders you to attend me to the Canon's house."

The shower of mud that bespattered Jock, as well as the pertness of her tone, ruffled his temper, much to her content, and gruffly he replied:

"I take no orders from Sir Ninian. I am not of his household."

"But you are the Canon's man, and the Canon's man is Sir Ninian's, who got him his Canonry."

"Sir Christopher is no man's man, as you know full well. He rules all in the Liberty. Sir Ninian himself does naught without the Canon's 'Yea.'"

The Baiting of the Wakeman

"'Tis common talk that your Canon hath now o'erstepped his power, and that the Archbishop means to bring him to heel for it."

"May be, or may not; and any way, no concern of the Lady of Clotheram."

Bertha noted with angry delight the growing surliness of his replies, and strove still further to rouse his wrath.

"You will bandy words with me, fellow?"

Jock shrugged his shoulders.

"I sought no talk with you. Art but a silly maid, worsened and not bettered by the three inches that Sir Christopher marked on the post. Lord! a year since and your black mane was lower than my shoulder. But there were times when you could be a good little comrade with rod on the Laver or trapping in Ellington Woods, when old Ralph was from home and before Sir Ninian shut you up. Yet at others a little spitfire, when you were crossed; like a wild cat I have seen you. But now—well, you need not speak with me, an you will not."

"Spitfire! Wild cat! By Our Lady y'are an ill-tongued knave, whose company I would at once avoid, did not Sir Ninian drive me to go with you to his son Richard at the Canon's."

"Ay, I will take you to Dick."

"Mind you, I would fain not go to this Dick."

"Ay, ay, there is sore trouble ahead for Dick."

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The maid reddened angrily at the meaning that he put into his words, and seeking for a bitter taunt, said reflectively :

"Of late, I'm told, you and Dick are seldom seen apart, and the cleric Edmund Brown makes a third in your company. 'Tis passing strange."

"Why should we not be friends?"

"For reasons many. Richard consorts with Master Brown because they both love learning; but why they two should seek the company of——"

"Of Jock Draglea, you would say," broke in Jock, stung into wrath again. "Jock Draglea, a dullard, who cannot talk prettily to maids. And yet let me tell you, mistress," he went on hotly, "Dick and I are of one mind on a certain matter."

"What common thought could there be between Sir Ninian's heir and—you?"

"Why," replied Jock, now white-hot with anger, "Dick tells me the knight his father would have him wed with you, but Dick——"

"Yes—and Dick?"

"Nay, after all it is no business of mine, except in so far as I am his friend."

"Truly no concern of yours. Still I would hear what it is that Richard Markenfield would or would not," she insisted in an ominously quiet tone.

But Jock kept his lips closed tight, and she continued :

"Be dumb then, for I know what you would say.

The Baiting of the Wakeman

Dick would not wed with me. Is that it? Gog's dear mother, you oaf! you clod! you thing! How I hate you!" and with that such a blast of fury and whirl of words broke over Jock that he must needs bend before the storm, and turned away in scowling silence.

But as suddenly there fell a dead calm, and looking round to see the cause, he caught full in his face the lash of her whip, which in her passion she had aimed at his head and shoulders.

An oath broke from him, and his blue eyes glared fiercely out of his weather-darkened face, on which the weal raised by her blow grew red and angry, whilst he said with deadly intensity:

"We be no children now to take and give blows that may be forgotten, but man and maid. May my soul rot in hell, mistress, if you do not pay in full for this some day."

His savage words and the sight of the red weal standing out on his cheek partly quelled her mood, and she faltered a little as she panted out:

"Blame yourself for your hurt. You angered me beyond endurance. As for your Dick Markenfield, he is a milksop and no mate for me. A strong man of his hands shall have me, no stay-at-home porer over musty Greek and Latin parchments. Take that to your Dick."

Then spurring her horse, she passed ahead of Jock, flinging back at him as she did so:

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"And you may tell your Dick Markenfield that I shall not be beholden to him and his father for my settlement in marriage, for that I have already seen him who shall be my man in spite of them all; nor shall Sir Ninian's bolts and bars hold me from him." And so she rode ahead.

And by this they had passed over Bondgate Brig, and had come near to the Water of Skell, as the millstream is called, which passeth at the foot of Walkmillbank, or Bedern Bank, the name which the street bore after the new Bedern was built on the slope.

Before Jock had reached the bend of Bondgate, which shut Bertha from his view, an uproar and a clatter, with peals of laughter, made him quicken his own and his horse's paces, to see what was going forward to disturb the mid-day quiet of the precincts of the church.

At the edge of the Water of Skell, here spreading out into a weedy duckpool, Bertha had brought her nag to a stand, whilst she gazed across and up the narrow street that descended steeply from the Archbishop's palace. As Jock drew near a barrel came leaping down the further slope, and splashing into the water, lay on its side in the shallow pond, half below and half above the surface. From it there issued a spluttering and a coughing with dolorous cries and groans, and soon a burly form wriggled out, with much ado, so closely did it fit

The Baiting of the Wakeman

its prison. Following behind was a horseman, swaying in his saddle with great gusts of laughter, and again behind him folk on foot.

Whilst the half-drowned man was still shaking himself free, and the people jeered at him, cheers and cries of warning burst out again in the street above, and those by the pool had to scatter, as a second barrel leapt down, attended by a man of gross body, but quick and active of foot, who kicked with his great riding boots at the cask, both to quicken its speed and to keep it in the middle of the road; and with his riding-whip he struck at clutching hands thrust out at the open end; and behind were other horsemen and many more of the people.

The last leap of this barrel took it into the slimy shallows of the pond; there it fell upright, but reversed upon its open end. Thus it stood rocking and shaking with the desperate efforts of its prisoner to win free, which was no easy matter, since he stood upon his head; until some friendly body in the crowd ran into the water crying, "Master Terrie must not drown!" and righted it. Then did a pallid head and a lank, shaking body creep out amid the jeers of the horsemen and of the baser sort among the people.

Not till then did the first laughing rider become aware of the Lady Bertha on the other side of the water. A quick glance of recognition passed between him and the maiden, to whom he doffed his plumed

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hat, bowing low in the saddle, whilst he exchanged greetings with her.

And Jock stood by with scowling, lash-marked face. Now he and the horseman were as different to look upon as two men well could be. For Jock was dark of face, and at most times sullen of countenance, and now was more ill-looking than his wont by reason of the red gash on his cheek; yet withal was he deep in the chest, with long sinewy arms and legs.

But the gallant was shapely and slim and debonair in all his person and bearing, and when the wild merriment faded out of his eyes, for a brief while his countenance was serene and beautiful, so that men, who looked on him at such times, would think of an angel's face, so full of grace was his; but this in rare moments; more often was it seen distorted with reckless mirth or marred with evil humour. And Jock o' Rippon being on foot, his face slashed and his jerkin bespattered with mud, was angered by the contrast between himself and the gallant rider, and, hot from his encounter with the maiden, yearned to find some vent for the rage in his heart.

Now they were not all of the mob who jeered at the victims of this sport, but only the horsemen with their leader and the baser sort of the people; but there were others who drew apart in pity of the ill-used men and with much indignation in their look

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To these Jock addressed himself angrily, pointing to the dripping forms of the two victims, who were now wringing out the water from their garments, wiping slime and duckweed from their eyes, and getting back their breath.

"Who dares," said he, "within the Liberty of Rippon to abuse Rippon men and even to put a slight upon their Wakeman?" For the taller of the two, who, bedrenched and bedraggled as he was, showed more dignity of person and dress than the stouter man, was indeed the chief townsman of Rippon, who had thus suffered from Ned Mallory and his men.

Not by this time the party who ranged themselves round the Wakeman had increased, and was increasing every moment, for the archers at the but on Fisher Green, where they had gone to practise for the prize shooting on St. Wilfrid's Day, came hurrying over Archer Bridge, their bows in their hands. Clerics rushed out from the door of the Vicar's house on Bedern Bank, and two of the substantial men of the church on their way to the Grammar

for their studies in Latin there, or to the school in the churchyard to learn their chants, young and hot of blood, ran up, eager to be blows might be struck, and more than one of the clerics was armed with a baselard by his side, although such was contrary to the recent injunctions of the Archbishop.

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And the Wakeman, having recovered his breath, stood out and said with such dignity as he could in such a plight :

"You may well ask, Master Draglea, who has dared so to infringe our liberties and to outrage us. We townsmen have our rights, and if these be not sufficient to stay the hand of such roysterers, you will bear witness before your uncle, the Canon, what these men have done unto us : how that they, *vi et armis*, have invaded the privileges of the Chapter in their Liberty of Rippon."

"What they have done, Master Wakeman," replied Jock, "is plain for all to see. But how did this begin?"

"They rode into Rippon, this Wilfred Mallory and his men that he has brought from foreign parts, to make an uproar, when our townsmen were peacefully at their mid-day meal. And since Sir Wilfred lies at Sir William Mallory's other Manor of Hutton, complaints shall be made before Sir William when he returns, and I doubt not that, being a just and a law-abiding man, he will not countenance his nephew's misdeeds; nor is this Wilfred Mallory otherwise of any standing in these parts, neither he nor his bullies, and we will not abide them."

His words were received by the better of the people with growls of anger, and a threatening movement was made towards the horsemen. Jock held up his hand.

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"Wait, masters. Wait till the Wakeman hath fully told his tale. To the matter, Master Terrie, and be brief."

"Why, he and his chief bully, the fat man there, beat at the doors of Master Bell, who keepeth the ale-house near by; and Master Bell, being at his dinner, as all decent men should be at that o'clock, it being no more than eleven of the morning, did not stir quickly enough to meet their desires; and others of the party, some of the riders yonder, were for tossing him into the Skell. Whereupon he called for help, and in the outcry that arose, as men ran to their housedoors and saw what was adoin, there was a cry for the Wakeman and his brethren; and no sooner had I called upon the disorderly crowd to disperse under the pains and penalties belonging to our office as guardians of the peace in this town, than one of the riders, who, with strong drink, could hardly sit his horse, roared out that the ale-house keeper and his champion the Wakeman should both be rolled in the former's barrels, to teach all such knaves, quotha, to move quickly when thirsty men would drink. And so, as you see——"

"Yes, yes, Master Terrie, I see," said Jock, impatiently breaking in on the Wakeman's long-winded tale. "And what," he continued, raising his voice, "and what are the men of Rippon doing to suffer quietly this despite by foreigners, not men of Studley or of Hutton even, but, belike, from overseas,

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led by this mad nephew of the Lord of Studley and Hutton, this man whose misdoing will yet make the name of Mallory stink in these parts?"

Now Jock o' Rippon had won this title in many a wrestling match and tussle against the country-side as champion of the men of Rippon, and when these saw their leader thus taking up their quarrel, Jock's words were as fuel to the smouldering wrath of the younger men, who gathered round the Wakeman and his fellow-victim; and they began to advance against Mallory's riders. But the Lady Bertha, who had laughed heartily at the struggles of the Wakeman Terrie in the barrel, laughed still more in shrill derision at Jock o' Rippon's anger, and Mallory, quick to note her amusement, said:

"The Lady of Clotheram smiles, but her footman frowns upon our merry sport. A plague on the footman, say I, and let him not meddle with the pastimes of his betters. That weal on your face, good fellow, should warn you not a second time to merit your mistress's riding-whip."

His insolent guess at the truth, knowing something of the shrewish temper of the maiden, struck Jock dumb with rage.

Presuming on his stillness, one of Mallory's men pushed his horse across the pool and struck the stag-laden nag with a resounding whack, crying:

"Go to, fellow; take home your master's meat and keep not the cook awaiting," and the nag, being high-

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spirited, splashed through the pool and galloped hard down St. Agnesgate.

This second insult stung Jock's spellbound limbs into sudden action. With a leap he was upon the horseman, his arm twined closely round him, and in a moment had dragged him from the saddle and hurled him into the water.

There, his head striking on the stony bottom, the fellow might have drowned, as he lay, had not the gross fat man pulled him out, while Mallory, with a curse, drew his sword and spurred his horse against Jock.

Now it was at that moment that the Canon and Sir Ninian came on the scene. They had ridden home by Kirkgate, and becoming aware from the shouting and the laughing that something unusual was afoot, had turned aside to see. The Canon at sight of the fallen horseman and of Mallory with sword drawn about to rush upon Jock, thundered out an order for all to keep the peace.

"Brawling in sight of the Archbishop's Palace," he cried, "and almost within the precincts of the church, is conduct such as I and the Chapter of St. Wilfrid will not abide."

Thereupon Mallory, but little abashed, sheathed his sword with a careless laugh, and bidding his men forbear, with no further notice of Jock, splashed across the pool to Bertha's side.

The sight of those two bending towards one

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another in familiar talk vexed Sir Ninian, and riding up to the girl, he reached for her bridle, whilst he said severely to Jock :

"It was no time for wrestling and fighting, Master Draglea, whilst you had my ward in your care. And you, mistress, will come with me to the Canon's house."

And so, in spite of the frowns of the maiden, who had fain stayed to see the outcome of the quarrel, he carried her off by St. Annesgate, leaving the Canon to assert the rights of the Chapter.

And the mob, knowing of old the stern masterfulness of the Prebendary and by recent report the mad recklessness of Wilfred Mallory, drew near with relish to hear what would take place between those two.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISHANDLING OF THE BAILIFF

Now the Canon was a staunch upholder of the house of Markenfield, and in Rippon the jealousy of Markenfield against Mallory drew most men one side or the other, although there was no open quarrel between the heads of the two houses.

But the Canon having, as it seemed, caught Wilfred Mallory and his men redhanded in the commission of disorderly acts, was taken aback by the hardihood of Sir Wilfred, who now, carelessly waving his hand to the cleric, made after Sir Ninian and Bertha, and would have thrust his company upon them had not the Canon spurred his horse across the road and barred his passage.

"Nay, Sir Wilfred, you must account to me for your abuse of Rippon men and your defiance of the Rippon Chapter. This is no part of Studley or Hutton Manors, and, even were it so, Sir William would not abet you in disorder. There be no lack of witnesses here to your invasion of Chapter privilege, if we have to carry this to the Archbishop's Court."

"Witnesses enough," cried the Wakeman. "We

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will witness when and where you will against Sir Wilfred."

"No doubt you will," laughed Mallory in scorn, "and much good may it do you. And you, Sir Prebendary, from all I hear, are like to come before His Grace's Court in another fashion than as complainant against these poor fellows of mine, who are passing an idle hour with a little pleasant jesting."

"God's mercy, man, do you call it pleasant jesting to roll the Wakeman of this town in a barrel?"

"Odds blood, and do you call it a light matter for your footman nephew to crack my man's skull with his wrestling tricks?" retorted Sir Wilfred, pointing to the dismounted rider, who was but now recovering from his swoon. "This is like to make a feud between Sir William and Sir Ninian."

"The Lord of Studley, if he is wise, will not uphold you and your men in your mad pranks," replied the Canon, "and all here will bear witness that ye were the aggressors. But who may be the gross foreign fellow here, who with your consent so abused the Wakeman?"

"Enough that he is a comrade of mine," said Mallory shortly. "Be content, if we cry quits. The Wakeman has but a wet jacket, whereas my fellow got a bloody sconce, and might have been slain by the toss he had from your nephew, the Wakeman's

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champion; and now let me pass. I have business with Sir Ninian."

The frown on the Canon's face relaxed in pride at the mention of his nephew's feat.

"'Twas a shrewd toss and well merited."

Mallory himself was content not to press the quarrel.

"Let it pass then, Sir Christopher. Why should we fall out about such a trifle? You are an old lover of sport yourself, and, faith, your fellow has gained my heart by that throw of his, from which Tom Braithwaite's head is still aching. Now here's an offer to settle the quarrel in friendly fashion. You are bent on bringing us to account. So be it. And the penalty—what is it to be? Some marching in shirt, bare-foot and bare-headed, candle in hand, at the head of your church procession? But the penance may be remitted for a fine if the culprit is willing to pay. Here, then, is my offer. By St. Wilfrid's Day I will find a wrestler to set against your Jock, who is called the champion of Rippon in this sport. If he throw my man, then will I and my riders do penance in church procession, or pay your fine, as you choose. What say you to that?"

The Canon hesitated. He dearly loved a challenge of this sort. The soldier and sportsman in him whispered "Yes," but the prudent church half of him said "No." He had his enemies in the Chapter who might make capital of this, as they had of other

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irregularities by which he was already in bad odour with the Archbishop; and so, seeming to put the offer by, he dallied a little with it.

"An idle challenge, that would forejudge you to abide the penalty. None within twenty leagues would dare so much as to come to grips with Jock of Rippon. Ye cannot escape or defer your judgment thus, and I hereby cite you and your followers to appear in the Chapter House on the morrow of to-day at ten o'clock, and there——"

"Stay, Sir Prebendary," interposed Sir Wilfred, "here and at once I will name my champion, who stands here within ten yards of you."

"Yourself?" said the Canon incredulously.

"Not so. With the sword I might; but at wrestling I count myself no champion. There stands my man." And he pointed to the gross, fat man who had kicked the cask down the hill.

Then all the people within hearing laughed loudly, "That fat man? What could he do against our Jock?"

But the Canon was not of their mind. He looked with some doubt on the great girth and weight of the man, and then turned to Jock to measure with his eye the length of his arms, and having done so shook his head.

"Why, the man's a mountain of flesh, and such a combat would be ridiculous. Therefore, Sir Wilfred——"

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It was Jock himself who now broke into the Canon's decision.

"Bethink you, Sir Christopher, that your penances may be lightly commuted for a fine, and this fat man was the foremost, they say, in the ill-treatment of the Wakeman. If you grant the match I will promise that the Wakeman shall be better avenged by the fall that I will give his ill-user than by your fines that they will lightly pay. Therefore, I say, let the challenge be accepted."

"It is well said. Leave the punishment to Jock," cried the Wakeman and those about him.

Then the big man stepped up to Jock and gave him a great clap on the shoulder that shook him through and through, and with a good-natured laugh, that was like the bellowing of a bull, he seized his hand and gripped it tight.

Jock gripped tighter still, whilst they stood looking into each other's eyes; and the laughter of the giant grew less and less, till at last he drew his hand away and stepped back, nursing it in his sleeve, and, shaking his head whimsically, lifted himself into the saddle on his horse, which one of them brought forward.

Then Sir Wilfred, bending towards the big man, spoke a word in his ear, and made no further attempt to follow Sir Ninian and the Lady Bertha, who had now passed out of sight. By this time the Canon was a sorely hungry man, and, leaving the matter

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undecided, he ordered the people to disperse to their homes, and then, saluting Sir Wilfred, he turned with a sigh of satisfaction to St. Annesgate; but on the opposite side of the river Skell a sight caught his eye that put dinner out of his mind and set people running to see the meaning of it.

For at this part, opposite where the millrace comes into Skell, stretches Bondgate Green, a fair wide expanse of meadow, dotted with a few whin bushes, and the York road coming from Hewick Bridge runs through the Green, and then turning off crosses the river at the ford by Archer Bridge, and so cometh into St. Annesgate, hard by the house where the Canon, Marmaduke Bradley, Prebendary of Thorpe, then dwelt.

Now, full in view of all at the foot of Bedern Bank, a horse was seen galloping down the road on the other side of Skell.

And there was something here to draw men's eyes in more than ordinary wonder. For close at the horse's heels ran a ragged friar, his gown tucked up in his belt of rope and his hood fallen away from his head, showing his face round and red and his mouth gaping open as he strove to keep up with the horse and to catch at the bridle hanging loose; and each time that he reached out the horse sheered off and broke from a canter into a gallop, though seeming weary; and the friar was left behind.

And what was stranger still was the burden car-

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ried by the horse, for in front and below his neck dangled a pair of legs, the feet knotted together, and a man's body lay all along the horse's back upon his face, his arms each side fastened below the girth; but his head could not be seen, for a long cloak that he wore was turned back over his head and fell upon the tail of the horse, encumbering his hind legs, and making him kick out at times to rid himself of the entanglement that flapped about his hocks.

Now when the friar saw men on the other side of the river he shouted as well as he might, between his gasps and coughs, that someone should run to the ford and head off the horse, who was following the bend of the road down to the river and now was out of sight behind the houses there.

And someone calling out, "'Tis the hermit of Hewick Bridge who wants us to stop the horse," there was a rush made down St. Annesgate, past the Prebendary of Thorpe's house to the narrow lane that between it and the Massendew comes up from the water; and here they were in time to cut off the horse with his prostrate rider, and seizing hold of the hanging bridle, as he was galloping into St. Annesgate, they brought him to a standstill.

And whilst some waited for the coming of the friar across Archer Bridge to explain the matter, others unbound the man who lay in that painful plight upon the horse's back.

And the cloak being drawn back, he was seen to

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be a bearded man, grave in face; and at once they exclaimed, "His Grace's bailiff, Master Walworth."

By this there was a great press of people in St. Annesgate; for besides the idlers that had gathered to see the baiting of the Wakeman others came running from either end of the street and through the churchyard, when it was noised abroad that the Archbishop's bailiff had been mishandled on the road; and the Canon had much ado to force his horse through the crowd that formed a ring round the bailiff and the friar, who was endeavouring to answer the questions that were showered upon him from all sides.

The lodgers that were in the Massendew poured into the streets, the weavers came hurrying over the bridge, and scattered about in the mob were the flat caps of the Grammar School boys stopping on their return from their dinners to their tasks in the house at the corner kept by Master Singleton. Even the sub-deacons and other church officials ran out of the churchyard down the steps of the south entrance; and had not Sir Wilfred, following the Canon, aided him in driving back the people and in crying silence that His Grace's bailiff might be heard, the uproar and confusion had made a clear tale hard to tell, for, as is usual at such times, wild accounts of what had happened quickly spread through the mob:

"The bailiff came here to do justice on Sir Wilfred's men for their treatment of the Wakeman, and

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he in his turn has been set upon and half killed by them."

"The Scots have descended upon Thirsk, and the bailiff, taking his life in his hands, has escaped to Rippon."

"The bailiff has summoned Matthew Hermit of Hewick for his irregular life to surrender his chapelry to the Archbishop, and the friar has appealed to the Chapter against the infringement of their privileges."

The bailiff was still breathless from the falling he had had and the strangling of his cloak's fastening, and was too busy chafing his wrists, benumbed with their bonds, to say much. The Canon, seeing he could as yet hardly stand upright upon his feet, bade two of his serving men, who had come out into the street, to carry him to his house, not a stone's throw distant; and going in front himself with Sir Wilfred, who kept close to him, he made a way through the throng.

In this manner the bailiff was taken through a side alley to the front of the house, whose garden sloped down by a grassy sward to the river Skell. There he was carried into the Great Hall and placed in a chair.

But whilst they were still in the street, and the people shouting this thing and that, Sir Christopher, to pacify them, after a word with the bailiff, turned and said in a loud voice:

"Master Walworth has been set upon by out-

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laws, who came out of the forest of Knaresborough, and has been robbed, but further than that we know not yet, and shall not, until he has been revived by a cordial. Then shall we do what we can to discover the robbers, and to bring them to justice, and I call upon you now to disperse under fear of the displeasure of the Chapter of St. Wilfrid."

In the hall, where serving men were now setting tables for the dinner which Sir Ninian, going ahead, had ordered should be ready against the arrival of the Canon, the knight of Markenfield was waiting with Bertha and with his son summoned from the Grammar School. These had taken little heed of the uproar outside, thinking that it was the contention between Sir Wilfred and Sir Christopher still continuing, and feeling assured that the Canon and the citizens would be more than a match for the other party.

And so they brought the bailiff and placed him in a chair on the dais, where he drank deep from the cup of wine which they brought him, and when he had drawn breath he said:

"Our Lady be praised. I thought I was a dead man."

Then, seeing his disarray reflected in the mirror opposite, he smoothed down his beard and drew his cloak more orderly about him to hide the rents in his doublet, for he was a precise and careful man.

"You see, sirs, the rough handling I have had.

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They set upon me by the woods, out of which they sprang so suddenly that my men had not time to get their weapons ready, and so the cowardly knaves fled incontinent back to York, leaving me in their hands."

"And who were they who fell upon you?" said the Canon and Sir Ninian together.

Now in replying the bailiff, having now his wits more collected, turned coldly from the Canon and gave the answer to Sir Ninian; and Sir Christopher, seeing the snub, smiled, but said naught as yet.

"Who they were, Sir Ninian, I know not, except that they were strangely clad with habit and rope girdle like friars."

Sir Ninian exclaimed sharply, "Clad like friars? Then it will be the band that has been troubling the country since——"

"Since the Cellarer of Jervaulx was captured," said Sir Wilfred.

Sir Ninian frowned. He had not at first noticed Sir Wilfred's entry amid the bustle of bringing in the bailiff. Now he was amazed at his assurance in following them, but Sir Christopher, too, had fixed his eyes upon the speaker, and now said :

"And that was not many days after you returned from abroad to Hutton Conyers."

"True, Sir Canon," laughed Sir Wilfred easily, "but would you connect the two events? I am not

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a friar, as you know, and my misdeeds are confined——”

“To revelling and baiting of peaceful folk,” replied the Canon sharply.

Sir Ninian broke in impatiently.

“The bailiff’s tale waits, gentlemen. What more, Master Walworth? They have not kidnapped you, it seems, to hold you to ransom, like the others.”

“No need for that,” groaned the bailiff. “I had much gold with me, received in rents, and many deeds and parchments of consequence, signed and sealed by His Grace the Archbishop, one of grave import to you, Sir Christopher,” he continued, for the first time turning his looks with much meaning on the Canon.

He had looked to see the Canon embarrassed, but the latter turned it off with a show of ignorance of the speaker’s meaning.

“A document touching myself, Master Walworth? What could that be?”

The other replied with some venom :

“A citation to appear before His Grace’s Commission at his Court in Rippon on the eve of St. Bartholomew to answer for certain irregularities whereof information has been laid against the Treasurer of the Chapter of St. Peter and St. Wilfrid.”

The Canon’s eyes twinkled, and his amused chuckle could hardly be restrained from bursting into an uproarious laugh.

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"God bless my soul! Then it appears, Master Walworth, that for the time the blows of my enemies have been spent upon the air."

"For the time it would appear so," replied the bailiff sourly.

Sir Wilfred, who, too, had been shaking with suppressed laughter, now put severe restraint upon himself to say with what gravity he could:

"It is to be hoped, Sir Christopher, that the bailiff does not suspect you of being concerned in this robbery."

The Canon stood in open-mouthed amazement at the insolence of Mallory, but the bailiff maliciously gave the suggestion some consideration.

"Far be it from me to accuse the Treasurer of the Chapter of such a felony. Yet Sir Christopher cannot be surprised, after his high-handed proceedings within the Liberty, if a suspicion of negligence should arise in the mind of His Grace, when the matter is reported to him."

"God's body, man," roared the Canon, "what do you mean by your insolence? That I—I, the Treasurer of the Chapter——"

"Come, come," interposed Sir Ninian, "assuredly even to imagine such a thing is ridiculous, and you know, as well as I do, gentlemen, that for months the neighbourhood has been terrorised by a band of kidnappers and robbers. There was first the disappearance of the Cellarer of Jervaulx and afterwards

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that of lesser men, next the stripping of Sir Simon Ward's house at Givendale of all its plate by a troop of horsemen that surrounded it at night. All imagine that these lawless acts may be traced to the gang of outlaws who call themselves 'The Friars' and have their nest in the Hambleton Hills; and who are more likely than these?"

"None, Sir Ninian," replied the bailiff with greater courtesy than he had shown to the Canon, "but what these rogues should want with my parchments it passes my wit to conceive."

"They will find a use for them, Sir Bailiff," replied Sir Wilfred. "They are said to be cunning knaves, and who knows to what vile purposes the sign manual of His Grace may yet be put?"

The thought seemed to trouble the bailiff, for he sank into a moody silence, until the Canon bethought him of the needs of the guest thrust thus by accident upon him.

"And now, Master Walworth," he said magnanimously, having recovered his temper, "if you will come with me into yonder chamber we can find some garments to replace your own sadly rent by those rascals."

But again Mad Mallory could not refrain from setting the Canon and the bailiff at one another like two gamecocks.

"Do not by mistake, my dear Canon, give him one of your hunting suits, or even that famous purple

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slashed doublet and wide stuffed trunks which I hear were mentioned in the citation that has gone astray, and of which your enemies make so much." For it was well known that the Canon's enemies had accused him of dressing in unseemly fashion, as became not a cleric and least of all the Treasurer of the Chapter.

Both the Canon and the bailiff frowned and looked embarrassed at so inopportune a jest, but the bailiff relaxed into a more gracious smile as he signified his acceptance of the Canon's offer.

So it came about that the Canon fed and clothed the tool of his enemies, and the same chances of the day brought under his roof Sir Wilfred and Sir Ninian, of the houses of Markenfield and Studley, whose hostility, veiled under outward civility, was becoming each day more bitter, both by reason of Sir William's growing pretensions, since Studley had been added to Hutton Conyers, and of his straying into those errors of the so-called New Faith which were hateful to Markenfield, a staunch upholder of the old order of things.

The strong suspicion which he now had that Sir Wilfred might be at the bottom of his ward's resistance to his plan for her settlement, and his recent talk with the Canon confirming the same, gave greater reason still for his dislike of this member of the Mallory family and for annoyance at finding him within the Canon's doors. Therefore, Sir Ninian now put on his stiffest manner in the few words that

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he was compelled to address to Sir Wilfred, withal keeping a watchful and suspicious eye upon him.

He was relieved, therefore, when Sir Wilfred took his leave without any further communication with his ward, who stood in converse with Richard Markenfield, a little apart from the group about the bailiff; and thinking now that all was safe Sir Ninian followed the Canon and the bailiff to remove some of the mud of the chase.

On returning sooner than the other two into the hall, he found Bertha no longer in it. The knight turned to his son, the only other occupant in the room. "Where is the Lady Bertha?"

Richard Markenfield was a slimmer copy of his father. He had the same high, bony nose, but a smaller chin; the same obstinate mouth, but a look of greater thought in his eyes.

"She said she would walk in the garden until supper was served."

"And why went you not with her?"

"She forbade me."

Sir Ninian made a gesture of impatience. "A pretty lover to have no power to keep your mistress with you a few moments, and that, too, with hawks about ready to snap up your pigeon! Even now who knows?" And he strode hastily to the outer door.

The noise of the mob had died away to a few murmurs in the distance. Down the side alley which

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led round to the front of the house there rang a single heavy tread, and for a moment Sir Ninian hesitated whether to follow in that direction; his eye had seemed to catch the plume of a hat passing the corner. But the Lady Bertha, twisting some garden weed in her hand, was advancing from the edge of the Skell, which flowed by the bottom of the garden.

With a suspicious glance at the maid the knight called her to him, chiding her for straying out of his sight, and taking the opportunity to admonish her on other points of her conduct during that morning, to which she listened in smiling silence and with a demureness so alien to her usual mood that it left the old knight doubtful and uneasy.

Meanwhile the Canon, leaving the bailiff with a choice of clerical habits all some sizes too large for him, had returned into the hall to see further to the entertainment of his guests. There young Markensfield stood at one window, drumming angrily with his fingers upon the diamond panes. Passing on to the other oriel, where was his own favourite seat looking out on the garden, his eyes were drawn to a folded parchment lying on his desk in the recess. In surprise he stooped to look at some sprawling characters in red, written across the back, and the words he read were these: "*Hoc clerico abreptum reddit clerico Sathanas adjutor.*"

With a puzzled frown the Canon turned the parchment over, and found himself reading the citation of

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the Archbishop to his beloved son Christopher Draglea, Treasurer of the Chapter of Rippon, to appear before his justices at his Court in Rippon, to answer certain charges preferred by others his "beloved sons" of the same Chapter.

Hearing Sir Ninian's footstep at the door, returning with his ward, the Canon thrust the parchment into the bosom of his doublet and went to meet them.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT CANON IN THE CHAPTER COURT

THE end of the week before the octave of St. Wilfrid was ever a busy time for the people of Rippon, and so it was on the morrow of the events, occurring on a Thursday, which so vexed the knight and the Canon.

Within and near the precincts of the church there was bustle from an early hour. The vicars were astir, consulting frequently in their common hall of the New Bedern or hurriedly passing to and from the church to give some charge to the sacristan, or the bellringer, or to the sub-deacons, for the ordering of the Great Procession on the day of the Feast.

There was a hunting out and a furbishing of vestments from the great chest in the north aisle of the choir and of all the triumphal paraphernalia from the dark corners of the church.

In the town men worked harder and with more haste than usual at their daily task to have all finished and their leisure bought for the holiday of the morrow. Down the steps at the south entrance to the churchyard, where the drone of the Grammar

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School boys conning their Latin could be heard on a summer's day through the open window, there was an occasional dash by two or three from the school door down the alley to see what was going forward in St. Annesgate on the one side or in the churchyard on the other; for Master Singleton was too much absorbed in Greek manuscripts with young Richard Markenfield and Edmund Brown to note who was absent from the room.

The broad nave of the church echoed with the hurried steps of those who went on the errands of the Chapter, and was thronged besides with most of the idlers of the city. Since the widening of the nave, giving space in it for all the citizens, men met here more than ever to make their bargains and even to discuss their secret matters, since there were many quiet corners in the wide aisles admirably suited for that purpose.

But the thickest press at ten o'clock in the morning was about the Chapter House, near the south door of the church. Here waited those who had been summoned to appear before the Commission of the resident canons. These were the real master of the Chapter and Prebendary of Monkton, Sir Christopher Draglea, Marmaduke Bradley, in later days Abbot of Fountains, and the Prebendary of Stanwick, who was also the Precentor of the church.

Usually Sir Christopher kept court alone, but it was rumoured that to-day the Precentor would pluck

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up courage to face the frowns of the masterful President and assert his rights against him.

Many about the door of the Chapter House were curious to know what would be the outcome of two charges of invasion of the Liberty of Rippon, one calling Sir Wilfred Mallory before the court, and a second thundered against persons unknown, who had assaulted and robbed *vi et armis* the bailiff of the Archbishop himself: and there was the usual uncomfortable group of those who had been summoned to answer for debt, for incontinence, or for some other irregularity that came under the jurisdiction of the Capitular Court.

When the bell of the church rang out eleven o'clock, the boys of the Grammar School rushed helter skelter down the lane, and a few minutes later two older youths came up the steps into the churchyard.

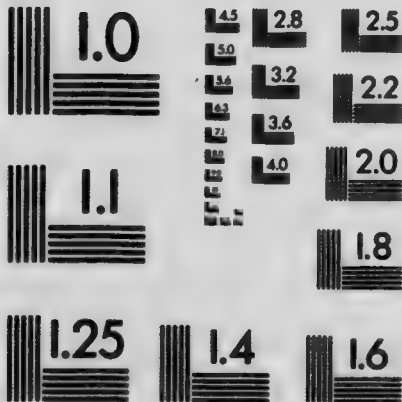
One was a young cleric in deacon's orders, with a thick clasped volume under his arm. With him walked young Markenfield, flushed and eager, while the deacon listened reluctantly.

"I tell you, Edmund, were it not for my father's anger, I would willingly see this Wilfred Mallory carry her off."

"Sir Ninian looks to his friends to prevent it," replied the cleric, "amongst whom I humbly count myself, both out of my love for his son and because the Canon is my patron. Nothing would vex both of



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these more than the success of Sir Wilfred in his villainous plots. If she is taken by anyone under Sir Ninian's very nose, it must not be by Sir Wilfred, to add her lands and all that belongeth thereto to the growing consequence of these pestilent Mallorys. How the matter stands I know from Jock Draglea, who had it from Sir Christopher."

"Come what may, I will not wed with this shrew," replied Richard Markenfield, with an obstinate set of the mouth.

As he spoke, they passed into the church by the south door. Inside they came upon Jock Draglea, who detached himself from the crowd when he saw them.

Markenfield eagerly caught him by the arm and drew him with the deacon to the quieter side of the church, exclaiming with satisfaction and going straight to the point.

"Well met, Draglea. My affairs need your counsel and help. This Bertha of Clotheram is no fit mate for me. Is it not so?"

Jock nodded, and pointed to the disfiguring mark on his face.

"If I could forget it, there is this to keep me in remembrance that Mistress Bertha is a dour maid for any man to woo."

"I owe the termagant a deeper grudge for that. Even my friends must suffer from her displeasures. But advise me what must be done."

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They had come to the tombs of the Markenfields in the north transept, and Richard paused to gaze gloomily at the stone figures of his ancestor, Sir Thomas, and Dionisia, his wife.

"She was a gentle and true wife to him, 'tis said, and her very gentleness rightly won her a place by his side; but I swear that if ever I rest in this church there shall be no carven image of Bertha of Clotheram to vex me in the grave."

The other two did their best to hide their smiles at the horror of the thought that showed itself in Markenfield's face, and he, with a shudder, drew an arm through each of theirs, while in solemn silence they paced the north aisle.

Suddenly he again burst out violently.

"I dread that mischievous girl more than the devil himself. Edmund, your counsels have saved me in many a scrape; Jock, your strong arm dragged me out of the Yore that day when the flood swept us off our feet. Far greater need than then have I of your help at this pass."

"How comes my strength of arm into this?" said Jock gruffly. "To my mind the matter is a simple one. Defy Sir Ninian and say you will not wed."

"I dare not," said Richard. "He has sworn he will disinherit me if I refuse to do his will."

"Then marry her, and break her spirit. A woman is but a woman, however shrewish her tongue may be."

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"You are stupid. You forget that I love Margaret Norton. A shrew, too, I cannot abide. Women should be gentle and submissive. Must I whip her like a mutinous hound to make her come to heel? Faugh! the very thought is disgusting. And bethink you, Jock, of the lash she gave you."

Jock's eye flashed. "There are other ways of making her gentle. I would I had the schooling of her."

Markenfield's face suddenly lighted up. "Stand to that and I am saved."

Jock stared in amazement, and Markenfield hastened to explain. "Yes, school her yourself: that is, wed her, carry her off. I should not then have to say nay to Sir Ninian, and so should escape his wrath."

Jock was speechless, but Brown laughed low in amusement. "Ay, you would escape, but what of Jock?"

Jock was now pulling his under lip in consideration. "I care not for the wrath of Sir Ninian."

"But what of the Canon?" said Brown in concern. "His anger would be great if his friend and patron is thwarted by you."

Jock's face fell, and after a moment's thought he shook his head.

"I had not thought of that. It cannot be, Dick. I will do naught to hurt Sir Christopher."

"Rather than hurt the Canon a little, you will not

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help your friend much," said Markenfield bitterly. "Better to have left me in the Yore than now to desert me in my need and see my life blasted."

Slowly pacing down the church, their talk had brought them to the west door, where many loiterers were gathered. A clatter of hoofs on the cobbles outside, the ring of spurs on the church steps, and amid angry murmurings from the crowd Sir Wilfred Mallory strode into the church, casting on each side amused glances at the black looks with which citizens made room for him.

"How now, my masters? What! Bear me a grudge still on your Wakeman's account? Go one of you to Master Terrie's and bid him come to the Church Court and bring his charges. I am here to pay in reason for our pastime yesterday."

But catching sight of the three friends passing the door, he broke off into a laughing salutation to them.

"Save you, gentlemen all. Do I see Sir Ninian's heir abroad straying from his lady's side? Fie on you, Markenfield, for a laggard lover. And wrestling Jock, my man of might. Alack! Sir Christopher withdraws himself from the match, I am told, with an eye to the Archbishop's displeasure. Yet, be of good cheer. You and my champion shall yet meet, an you will. Master Brown, we look some day to see you a canon. A simple chantry is not enough for your merits, and for learning, who knows? You

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may yet be summoned to court to instruct the Princess Mary."

Thus, with dazzling smile and gracious words, Sir Wilfred went about to thaw the coldness with which each of those three regarded him.

"But I must to the Court. Adieu, sirs. Yet stay. I had wellnigh forgotten," fumbling in his belt and drawing forth a folded letter. "This was for your father, Sir Ninian, young sir. Will you favour me? 'Tis of some importance."

Richard Markenfield replied coldly, "Markenfield Hall lies at no great distance, Sir Wilfred. I do not return for some hours, and, methinks, your men that were with you yesterday have time on their hands that might better be employed in such services."

"A.y, yesterday it was so, the rascals; but to-day they are gone some six leagues nearer York on pressing business of mine, and I have not one in attendance. Well, if you will not, I must find me another messenger."

But Richard's ungraciousness did not reach so far. "That being so, I will be your letter-carrier, and I shall not have far to go on your errand, for Sir Ninian lay at the Canon's house last night, and did not return to Markenfield. For aught I know, he is still there, since I came straight from Markenfield to Master Singleton at the Grammar School."

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A light danced in Sir Wilfred's eye as he handed the missive to him.

"The matter of the letter being what it is, Sir Ninian will think my choice of messenger could not have been bettered," and with a ringing laugh Sir Wilfred strode up the church to the Chapter House, leaving Richard Markenfield pursing his lips and wondering what he might mean.

But Jock o' Rippon had listened in some bewilderment at what had passed between those two. "Said you Sir Ninian lay at Sir Christopher's last night?"

"Ay," replied Markenfield. "After we had supped, Sir Ninian said he had matters of moment that he would discuss longer with the Canon, and sent me on to Markenfield with the Lady Bertha, saying he would return himself within the hour. But later came a messenger to say Sir Ninian, being still in converse with the Canon, would lie there that night and return in the morning."

Jock shook his head.

"There is something strange in this. The knight to my knowledge did set forth not an hour later, when 'here was still some light in the western sky. 'Tis certain he lay not in Rippon this night."

Richard Markenfield looked startled.

"Then if Sir Ninian left the Canon's house before dark and never arrived at Markenfield, where did he pass the night?"

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"Not in Rippon for certain, since I went with him as far as the bridge and there bade farewell to him."

"This matter needs looking into," replied Markenfield in an agitated tone; "the messenger brought my father's signet ring and word that he needed the little casket that stands on the table in his private chamber, and on the evidence of the ring we gave it him. I fear some practice on Sir Ninian, and I must speak with Sir Christopher at once."

"You know he is holding Court?"

"Court or no Court, he will see me, since the matter admits not of delay."

And so they followed Sir Wilfred into the Chapter House.

When Mad Mallory stalked in there was a rustle in the Court and a pause in its proceedings. His coming could hardly have been better timed.

At nine o'clock, after Prime, the canons and vicars had met in the Chapter House, and, with much Court business to be disposed of, the reading of Preciosa had been more hurried than usual. The service over, there followed a discussion of the private matters of the College, which was brief and breezy.

Never had the Chapter meeting been so fully attended nor with so much expectation of what might there occur. For beside a number of lesser clergy there were four canons present. There was the gentle

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and pious Marmaduke Bradley, one day to be Abbot of Fountains. There were the "Three Kits," as they were familiarly known—Christopher Draglea, the Treasurer; Christopher Seal, the Precentor; and Christopher Joye, who held the Prebend of Studley, sometime spoken of as Killjoy among the citizens, acid, intolerant, and suspected of leaning to the New Faith. Though one in their baptismal name, the Three Kits were not one in thought, but two against and him the masterful Treasurer.

The Precentor would have shrunk from attendance at the Court, where he had suffered many a snub from the Treasurer; but to-day he would have a backing from the Canon of Studley.

In a rash moment the Precentor had plucked up spirit to assert himself against the iron rule of the Treasurer. The latter had, he complained, set aside his authority as *rector chori* by pardoning a choir-boy on whom he himself had imposed a penance for unpunctuality in his duties. The complaint drew a growl from the Treasurer, as he contracted his brows with a fierce look at the Precentor.

"Penance too severe. I have spoken to him. He will not be careless again."

Thereupon the Precentor, trembling under the glance which the Treasurer threw at him, had sat down suddenly, flushed and crestfallen, but with a secret side look at the Prebendary of Studley.

Now he of Studley and the Precentor had come

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to that Chapter in the hope of witnessing a triumph over their common foe.

Stung to rebellion by the overbearing manner of Sir Christopher, who disregarded all precedents, and brushed aside all opposition to his will in matters great and small, these two had plotted to bring about his shame and downfall. With the unwilling consent of the other Canons, a complaint had been drawn up and forwarded to the Archbishop setting forth the irregularities and even greater offences of the Canon of Monkton.

Sir Christopher Joye was made of sterner stuff than the Precentor, and there was little love lost between him and the Treasurer. The old soldier took an indulgent view of life for himself and others, and had little patience with the ascetic severities of Killjoy. In his thoroughgoing loyalty to the Old Faith he held in detestation the advanced views of the lantern-jawed theologian who corresponded with friends in Germany.

When, after his defeat, the Precentor glanced appealingly at him, Sir Christopher Joye knew what was required of him. He had undertaken to ask the Treasurer in open court whether he had duly received a citation to appear before the Archbishop's Commissioner to answer the charges brought against him. It was known that Master Walworth had arrived the evening before. It was expected that he would come to the Chapter Court, and to secure the greatest pub-

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licity it had been arranged that the question, although concerning the private affairs of the College, should be put after the court had been thrown open.

So soon, therefore, as they had with secret satisfaction seen Walworth enter and an honourable place courteously allotted to him by the Canon presiding, the Canon of Studley had duly risen and put his question to Sir Christopher.

But the latter disappointed them by showing no annoyance or surprise, blandly replying: "His Grace's bailiff being here himself in court, it would be well to inquire of him whether he has any citation to deliver to me or to any Canon of this Chapter."

Thereupon Walworth had replied briefly and with some uneasiness of manner that he had no citation or any information on any such matter.

Now, Sir Christopher had as host so entertained his unwilling guest on the previous night and so won upon him by his heartiness that Master Walworth soon became of another mind and loath to be made the tool of the discontented Canons. Moreover, Sir Christopher had given him to understand that his friend, Sir Ninian Markenfield, was exerting all the influence which he had at Westminster to counteract the effect of the complaint and to give his Grace quite another view of the matter, and that to such an extent had he already succeeded that it was in the highest degree unlikely that the citation which had gone astray would ever be renewed.

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Having thus prepared his way, Sir Christopher now contrived to turn the plotting of his enemies to their own undoing. For even as they had hoped to embarrass him before men by deferring a matter that concerned the Chapter only until the public had been admitted, he now made them writhe with shame and defeat, since the old soldier had better generalship than they.

"I will have you know, Master Walworth, and all present," he said, "that the citation about which this question has been put is that which my enemies, backbiters, and ill-willers in this city, and to my sorrow be it said, even in this Chapter, have hoped to obtain by false and malicious witness against me. And what think ye is the real quarrel between me and them? They would say, 'Many things,' but there is only one matter and one only on which our controversy stands. You must know then, my masters, that I hold not with those who, following the pernicious teachings of the German Luther, go about to change the doctrine of this realm. But there be in this very Chapter those who would contravene the Old Faith, recently upheld and defended by our lord master, the King, whom God assoilzie. There be those in the Chapter, I say, who hold with Mallory of Hutton. He is known of all as favouring these heretical doctrines and even now being absent in London——"

The entrance of Sir Wilfred at that very moment

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when Sir Christopher was speaking of his kinsman Sir William, the head of the family, caused men to turn eyes that way, and a thrill of excitement to pass through them, as they wondered how a Mallory would take such words.

But Sir Christopher, although he paused in his denunciation, was nothing abashed.

"Ha! You come in a good hour, Sir Wilfred. You come to hear how I am slandered and troubled by evil men in this city. Let your kinsman look to it, I say, that these plotters get no backing from him. And since you are here Sir Wilfred, the court will proceed to the charges which Master Terrie brings against you."

"No party am I to your Chapter's squabbles," replied Sir Wilfred, "and my kinsman is well able to maintain his own quarrel. I am here to answer for yesterday's doings, when the Wakeman had a ducking. Master Terrie, it seems, resented his acquaintance with the inside of an empty barrel, being more accustomed, he and Master Bell, the Taverner, to deal with full measures."

"You do Master Terrie an injustice," interrupted the Canon. "All men know him for a sober citizen."

"Is it so? Then belike it was the cold water he did not relish."

"However that might be," said the Canon austere, "you did ill, Sir Wilfred, in thus maltreat-

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ing one of our citizens. What is worse, in so doing you trespassed against the liberties and privileges of this Chapter."

"I came not to dispute it, Sir Treasurer, but to make submission to your authority."

"It is well," replied the Canon in a mollified tone, "and since you show no contumacy, my brother Canons will agree with me that we need impose no severer penance on you than this, that on St. Wilfrid's day you should walk before the church procession bare-foot and bare-headed, bearing in one hand a lighted candle, and——"

Sir Wilfred interrupted with a grimace, "Yes, yes, Sir Treasurer, but may we not omit these unpleasant details? A fine in lieu of penance is usual. St. Wilfrid is apt to be reasonable in such cases. And since the offer I made you yesterday anent your wrestling Jock——"

"We will not speak of it," said the Canon hastily. "It cannot be. But we are agreed that in commutation of this penance you and each of your men concerned should pay a fine of two shillings, and that you should further salve the injuries of the Wakeman and the Taverner in such sort as they shall agree."

"Your fines shall be paid. I am, as you see, a dutiful son of the Church, and will obey your decrees."

"That is well. And 'twould be better still if, in

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the future, you and yours would bear in greater respect——”

But here the gruff bass of the Treasurer rolling under the vaulted roof was drowned by an uproar ~~that~~, beginning with some distant cries, gathered volume, until it broke into an explosion, as the door of the court was thrown open, and Sir Ninian, in disordered dress, pale and passionate of face, with quick, uneven steps, broke in, and at his back was a dusty lime-burner, reluctantly pushed forward by Richard Markenfield, and again behind him Jock o' Rippon, with Edmund Brown.

The members of the Court half rose from their seats in open-mouthed wonder at Sir Ninian, who, breathless and distraught, for a moment could hardly find speech.

“Ay, ay! Ye sit there, ye sit there—and ye fine—and ye suspend—and ye excommunicate—and outside—— What be men doing? Thieves—and outlaws—and rufflers—gathering from all the country round into this Liberty, since here they can ruffle and rob and kill without let or hindrance from this worshipful Chapter.”

Sir Christopher rose and banged his fist on the oaken table in front of him. “God do so to me and more, Sir Ninian, if you shall not have justice, and if men have dared to mishandle you, as by your plight seems likely—but first your tale?”

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Sir Ninian waved the lime-burner forward. "Let him tell how he found me."

The lime-burner, finding himself in such worshipful presence and all eyes fastened upon him, was for shrinking back, but being pushed to it by Sir Ninian, hawed and hummed and blurted out a few hoarse words.

"A' found Sir Ninian fast hand and foot in t'hut down under Whitcliffe." Then gathering confidence from the breathless interest with which everyone listened to him, he continued :

"Ay, hand and foot, neck and heel, a' found him like—like, ay, for arl the warld like a carted calf."

"Pish!" broke in Sir Ninian, reddening at the lime-burner's homely simile. "Pish! The fellow will take all day to tell his tale. I left your house, Canon, at ten o' the clock, as you know. Coming to Whitcliffe Lane, and almost in sight of my own chimneys, I was set upon suddenly by two riders dashing out of the woods, dragged from my horse, bound hand and foot, and carried down the hill to the hut near the quarry there. There I lay all night, until this man, happening to come for a load of lime, found me there, and without turning back to Markenfield, I have come to your court for justice."

"And they robbed you?"

"Of my signet ring only."

The younger Markenfield here put in a word: "That ring was brought to the Hall last night, and

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to the bearer I gave a certain casket for which he asked, containing important parchments, my father tells me."

"Of one of those parchments I spoke to you yesterday, Canon. You may guess, therefore, from what was said then, who knew enough to rob me. Right well I know the man, and I denounce here in your court, I denounce——" Sir Ninian's eye was wandering over the company in the court, and suddenly he stopped.

When Sir Ninian came in and those with him, Sir Wilfred had fallen back behind the others who stood near the door, but now, as the knight raised his voice to denounce the robber, while all listened eagerly, his eyes fell on Mallory smiling upon him, and for a moment he stood spellbound and stammering.

So long and so intently did Sir Ninian gaze upon Mad Mallory that those around the latter drew away from him, leaving the two confronting one another, and everyone knew whom Sir Ninian would name.

"I denounce you, Sir Wilfred Mallory."

Sir Wilfred took two steps forward, and said, speaking distinctly :

"On what grounds? Am I to be the scapegoat for all the rascalities done in your Liberty because I have of late returned from abroad?"

"Rather do I denounce you because you have declared yourself a suitor for Bertha of Clotheram,

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intended for my son; because you and you only besides myself, the Treasurer and the Lady Bertha, know the import and value of the parchment that you stole by the aid of my signet ring."

"Ha! the casket, in which was the precious mysterious document. It seems I knew where it lay in your house. Am I a wizard with second sight?"

"You knew because the Lady Bertha herself told you where it lay, when you were in the garden of the Treasurer's house with her but yesterday," ventured Sir Ninian with a flash of happy conjecture.

Sir Wilfred turned to the President.

"This is a grave charge, Sir Christopher, with little warrant to it."

Before the President could reply, Master Walworth, the bailiff, was on his feet, speaking in his precise tones.

"Give me leave, Sir President; I, too, have something to say on this head. When the crowd gathered round me yesterday, whilst you and the others, Sir Christopher, released me from my cramping bonds, and as the blood came back to my tingling limbs and some sense into my brains, jolted and aching with the prancing of that nag, I heard one near me crying out, 'Make way for Sir Wilfred,' and, looking up as well as I might, I saw him who cried out, though only for a moment, before the people closed about him. And the voice struck my ear as that of the busiest of the villains who mishandled me a few

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hours before, a bulky rascal like ~~him~~, whom for a moment I saw in the crowd, one of Sir Wilfred's own men."

The Treasurer fixed his eye sternly upon Mallory. "What say you, Sir Wilfred, in your defence against these charges?"

For answer Mallory spoke to the apparitor, who stood near the President's chair.

"Hand me the Sacred Evangelists."

And the apparitor came forward and passed to him a clasped volume.

Then Sir Wilfred, taking it into his hands, said: "Now listen Sir Treasurer and Canons and others of this Chapter, and all men here present, to the unfeigned answer which I make to these my accusers. I, Wilfred Mallory, laying my hand on this holy book, do declare solemnly, before you all and before God my Saviour, that if I had hand or part either in the seizure of Sir Ninian and the taking of the casket, or in despoiling and abusing the Archbishop's bailiff, then am I a man accursed, doomed to everlasting perdition, with no hope for the salvation of my soul."

As they listened to the oath in that vaulted chamber, men shivered and felt a chill in the air, and it was several moments before anyone could move or speak, and then the Treasurer said:

"No Christian man could take such an oath and be false. Therefore we require not, as is usual in

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such cases, any further compurgation by witnesses of Sir Wilfred. And you, Sir Ninian, must needs yourself believe him."

Then Sir Ninian replied dully in sore amazement :

"As you say, he could not so blaspheme, it must be so. I must therefore be mistaken in my suspicion."

Then Sir Wilfred, whose chin had fallen on his breast, lifted his head and said to the lord of Markenfield :

"But take heed, Sir Ninian, and read your letter that your son has for you."

Richard of Markenfield with a start, for he had forgotten the matter, drew out and gave to Sir Ninian the letter shortly before entrusted to him by Mallory, and Sir Ninian opening it read there :

"The bird you have ensnared will escape on St. Wilfrid's Day. So look to your prison bars."

Then Sir Ninian, with a curse, tore the paper across, and flinging the pieces in Sir Wilfred's face, strode out of the room, pursued by the derisive laughter of Mallory.

CHAPTER VIII

JOCK O' RIPPON'S WRESTLING MATCH

ST. WILFRID'S Day dawned fair and fresh after an eve of thunderstorm and heavy rain. Semmerwater under a strong wind had poured his pent-up flood into the Yore, and the mud-brown waters swirled deep and strong beneath the North Bridge.

From early in the morning groups of people, mounted and afoot, passed over the bridge, thronging in from Nunwick and Hutton and all the six towns of Hutton Moor, whilst the oblation box of St. Sitha grew heavy with the offerings of the passers-by; for the floods had made the fords impassable, so that all who would go to the feast from the north side of the river must pass that way or by Hewick.

There was much to draw men to Rippon that day. There was the great procession round the church, in which the Markenfields and Wards, Swales and Arthingtons, Mallorys and others, who held lands under the Chapter, would fulfil their feudal obligations as bearers of the Holy Shrine. There would be the Sanctuary men carrying their gyirthrods before the Feretory of the Saint, and after it every vicar and chaplain, chantry priest, deacon and sub-deacon

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that could be mustered, including even a contingent of monks from Fountains Abbey.

The great religious ceremony of the forenoon would be followed by shooting for prizes at the butts on Fisher Green and by other games and sports. All these the clergy and the Chapter encouraged, thinking the people better so employed after observance of their religious duties than in listening to certain attendants at the Fair who came from Hull, bringing pestilent new doctrines from overseas and eluding the vigilance of the church office.

None was a sturdier upholder of the sports of the Feast than Sir Christopher, the Treasurer. His deep voice and burly form were familiar, too familiar his enemies said, at the butts and amid the booths.

This year he had greater need than ever to be circumspect. Sad tales had been sent by backbiters to the Archbishop of his engrossment in lay pursuits. The wrestling match with which Mad Mallory had offered to settle his differences with the Chapter in the matter of the assault upon the Wakeman was entirely after Sir Christopher's own heart, but he had to walk warily just now and to forgo so open a proof of his sporting instincts. Therefore had he in public frowned upon and pooh-poohed the offer.

But having duly fined Sir Wilfred and his men in Court, he raised no objection when his nephew, egged on by the younger townsmen of Rippon, begged

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leave to meet Sir Wilfred's champion to wrestle for the honour of the town, which prided itself on the invincible might of the Treasurer's nephew.

Therefore it was that after the religious services and spectacles of the morning the people gathered first to Fisher Green to see the shooting for prizes, and afterwards moved in a body to Holly Hill to witness the wrestling match there.

This change of ground was mainly due to the Treasurer. He had represented to Jock and Sir Wilfred that from the windows of the houses on the four sides of the hill the townsmen would have a better view. Moreover, he had determined, whilst giving his enemies no handle against him, to be a spectator himself, privately retired from the crowd on the balcony of the inn at the corner of Kirkgate. His presence there would be under colour of entertaining at noon-day dinner Sir Ninian and the other gentry who had in duty bound taken part in the procession, his own hall at the Prebend House being too small to accommodate so many.

So it came to pass that when some two hours later the people gathered in front of the inn to witness the struggle between the wrestling champions, most of the knights and gentlemen, mellowed with the good fare provided by the Canon, were still at the inn and in a mood for sport. The balcony of the inn was not large enough for all, and leaving the Canon there to enjoy his private view, the rest walked out

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to the stables at the back to mount their horses, and from their backs look down upon the wrestling.

Sir Ninian was much distracted. It was incumbent on him more than on any other of the gentry to be present at St. Wilfrid's Feast. But he dared not, after recent ominous events, leave his ward at Markenfield Hall, guarded though it was, whilst he was away in Rippon. Whoever it might be that had tricked him out of possession of the casket and its contents, there was Sir Wilfred's own avowal in the letter that someone would carry off his ward that day.

He had resolved, therefore, to keep her under his eye wherever he went, and with him she had gone to the Festival, where perforce he must himself attend. At the inn afterwards he had seen to it that she should be served with dinner in a little chamber adjoining the dining-hall, where he sat with the Canon and the other guests. The dame of the inn had attended to her needs, and the knight sat where he could see her through the open door when he chose, although there was little fear that she could be spirited away, since the only exit from the little chamber was into the hall. And when he with the others wished to view the sport he had Bertha's nag brought out with his own and her bridle fastened to a rein which he held in his own hand, and thus he was able to enjoy the spectacle without fear.

Jock Draglea had little leisure in the forenoon to think of his match with the fat man, and made no

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sort of preparation for it. He had been entrusted with the entertainment of a Spanish gentleman of dark complexion and stiletto beard who, with one attendant, had come into Rippon at an early hour on his way through to York. Being informed what was afoot, the stranger had ridden to the Canon's door, and with the religious fervour of his nation had begged for a place in the procession in honour of the saint and for the good of his own soul.

Courteously excusing himself from personal attendance on his unexpected guest on the score of his many duties that day, the Canon had handed him over to Jock with strict injunctions to find him a place of honour in the church, and in every respect to wait upon his wishes, afterwards seeing to it that he should be brought to the inn that he might be entertained by him there amongst his other guests.

Long before mid-day Jock had wearied of listening to the broken English of the voluble Spaniard. He was only too glad when the foreigner proposed that he and his man should proceed to the inn and rest from the fatigue of the morning, so as to do justice afterwards to the entertainment of Sir Christopher.

When Jock left the inn he found the Hermit of Hewick anxiously inquiring for him. His broad, red-whisker-fringed face lighted up in some relief when he saw Jock.

"Lad, I have looked for thee up and down, and should have found thee resting in some shady place,

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and not flitting here and there in the hot sun. On these small matters turn mastery in the matches."

Jock laughed confidently.

"Nay, if I am not to throw the fat man in the afternoon much care and forethought in the forenoon will not stand me in much stead."

"Well, look you, this is another matter to-day. 'Tis a monstrous man. Such as you have never yet clipped. Your hands will slip on his greasy sides. I have thought on it, and here's what will prove his undoing if you play your part successfully." And he took from his girdle a little bag and thrust it into Jock's hand.

"'Tis good powdered resin; rub your hands and arms with it when you strip for the match, and then all his tallow will be of little avail to him. And see tha', who were they who went with thee into the inn?"

"A Spaniard who came to my uncle, a dark man."

"And he with him?"

"His servant."

The Hermit stared in a puzzled way at Jock, and said slowly:

"The sun was up but an hour when a man came to the bridge and asked for the boat that I keep tied beneath it for my fishing, but which through last night's floods was hauled ashore, and he gave me a crown and said he would bring back the boat before

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sunset. Then he fastened to it a rope he had with him, and from the bank hauled it up stream until he passed out of sight towards Roman Riggs. But I could not follow him, for many folk began early to cross the bridge, and I needed to stay there to ask their offerings."

"Well, well," said Jock impatiently, "yours is a long tale, Matt. Bring it to a head. Who was the man?"

"It was the servant of the Spaniard who went into the inn with you. What did he want with my boat, think you?"

"How should I know?" said Jock carelessly. "Folk are coming together on the hill and will be looking to see me ready for the fat man; it would be a shame to be found a laggard."

Matthew the Hermit went off shaking his head. There was something in this which pointed to mystery, and he would have liked to wait for another sight of the Spaniard's servant to be sure that he had not been mistaken. But he had other matters on his mind.

Now, the Hermit had been a sturdy wrestler himself. Three things had been the business of his life, and for those three the people of Rippon honoured him. As chapel priest, living in the little room over the chapel on Hewick Bridge, he had maintained the service of the chapel and duly mended the bridge, using the offerings in the box and his own labours to

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that end. Moreover, there was no such fisherman as he through the length of the Yore, the Laver and the Skell. Lastly, he had held the bridge as champion wrestler against all comers that way.

When men passed down the hill towards the bridge the Hermit never failed to stop them with a call for alms to place in the box for the maintenance of himself and it; and such times as he could steal away himself, leaving some poor brother cleric in charge, he would give to fishing for trout or grayling or chub in the three rivers, and especially above and below his own bridge. There was no such fisherman far and wide, and on him the Canons could count for regular supplies of Friday and Lenten fare. A hermit was he from love of God's beasts and not through avoidance of man. A boon companion could he be, full of quips and jests and talk of birds and beasts, when he brought his fish to Rippon, and there were even times when the alehouse on Bedern Bank had his shaggy fringe of beard wagging over a pot at the trestle table.

But most often he could be seen wading in the river's midst above bridge, where, with one eye upon his bait and another on the white road coming down the hill beyond, he could hook a fish or, dropping rod and net, stop the traveller on the bridge. Few were hardy enough to button their purses against so sturdy a beggar; and should there come along some tall fellow, whose breadth of shoulder or sinewy arm

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marked him for a man of might, then the Hermit would step across his path with a challenge to try a fall with the chapel priest for love of sport and good fellowship, the stake a prayer for the traveller's soul should he prove the better man, a silver coin into the oblation box if—and it never happened contrariwise—the wayfarer took the toss.

Through many years men of girth and muscle had passed that way, but never yet had the box been the poorer by a single groat. At these tussles the Treasurer's nephew, coming to the bridge to learn fisher lore of the Hermit, was often the umpire, thus becoming expert in all the wrestling tricks of the countryside; and when he grew to be man enough, Matthew would call upon him to stand up to him, that he might show by what hold or trick he had worsted his last opponent.

Then one day Jock laid his master flat on his back in the grassy meadow by the water-side, and the Hermit, rising ruefully in mingled chagrin at his overthrow and pride in his pupil's progress, called himself a beaten man. Henceforth it should rest with Jock Draglea to uphold the honour of the bridge and of the City of Rippon. No longer must it be Matt of Hewick, but Jock o' Rippon, whose name should be bruited abroad as champion wrestler in the County of York. Now, this being said before several who had seen the Hermit get his fall, the name clung to Jock, and soon by his many victories far and near

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became as familiar as that of His Grace of York, so that in the end far more than the mantle of the Hermit's fame fell upon his shoulders.

Never once by defeat had he disgraced his master. If, therefore, to-day he lost against Sir Wilfred's enormous champion, there would be a bitter *miserere* for the Hermit to chant in his little chapel on the bridge.

So at that early hour, leaving another in charge to take his tolls, Matthew had come into Rippon to back his pupil in the ring by whispering in his ear between the bouts the cunning strategy whereby he might overcome his bulkier foe.

The crowd stood thick about the ring. Clusters of heads showed at the open windows. Many were astride of the roof ridges of the smaller straw-thatched houses.

When the Canon's guests rode out of the stables of the inn into Kirkgate and up the street into the open space, they were greeted with cheers, since their coming promised that the sport would soon begin, and folk made way for the gentry and for the Markenfield party, to whom the Spaniard had attached himself, prancing along on a pure black horse.

Sir Ninian took up a position close to the edge of the ring, so that the head of Bertha's nag hung over Jock as he sat facing his opponent. She was between the knight and his son, her rein being fastened

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to Sir Ninian's bridle. The Spaniard took his stand with them next to Richard Markenfield, making himself gracious by gallant talk in halting English to the lady on the other side.

Jock was ready stripped of jerkin and shirt, and the Hermit by his side was closely watching Sir Wilfred's man as he cast off his. A murmur went up as the huge shoulders and hairy chest of the giant were exposed to view. Fat though he was, there were great muscles on his shoulders and flanks that rose and fell as he stretched his arms upwards, and the faces of Jock's friends grew long. Never yet, said they, had their champion met in the ring one of such immense girth and visible might, one who, although of great height, overtopping Jock by inches, when he stood near, yet had appeared of ordinary stature, so much did his width and depth dwarf his height. And no one there knowing his right name through the secrecy of Sir Wilfred, they called him during the match the "Man from Hull" or "The fat wrestler."

The Hermit, as he had promised, stood by Jock, ready with his advice and support, and from the balcony the hearty voice of Sir Christopher bade his nephew quit him like a man, and for the honour of the town strain every nerve to overthrow the foreigner.

"St. Wilfrid put iron into your grip, lad, and make your legs pillars of strength," he cried, and the

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crowd shouted "Amen " to that, as though the Canon had said a prayer in church.

But there was no backer for the Hull wrestler, and all wondered that Sir Wilfred was not come.

Sir Ninian, who had with watchful eye noted Mad Mallory's disappearance after the procession and service in which he had taken his part, now felt the more secure, laughing in his heart and commending his own craft in bringing Bertha with him, for he shrewdly guessed that Sir Wilfred was even then prowling near Markenfield in wait for Bertha, expecting her to return like other gentlewomen after service in the church.

"Ho, Master wrestler, why cometh not Sir Wilfred to back thee?" he shouted across to Jock's opponent.

And the wrestler looked cunningly up at Sir Ninian and said :

"I need no backing, Sir Knight; give your man all the heartening you may, for he will sorely need it. As for Sir Wilfred, being sure of the issue, maybe he hath gone on business that more nearly touches him. But in that he is like, it seems, to come back empty-handed, eh, Sir Ninian?" And with a glance at Bertha the giant cocked his eye slyly at Sir Ninian.

At that Sir Ninian looked more gay of countenance and well content, for he felt assured why Sir

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Wilfred had not come, and he replied lightly:
heartedly:

"Since Sir Wilfred comes not, and if Sir Christopher, who backs his nephew, consents, let the play begin, say I."

Then all the people became very still and the wrestlers made them ready.

But the Spaniard chattered on, bending in front of young Markenfield to address himself to Bertha, and amid the quiet of the crowd his words and hers could be heard all round the ring, and the Spaniard, except that he interlarded his English with foreign words, spoke in such good fashion that his meaning was not hard to take.

"St. Jago! A brave show and gallant. Yet, methinks, there is undue lack of ladies, Mistress Bertha. 'Tis not so in my country, where ladies flock as much as men to see the Moorish tilting."

"My father spent much time in your country," replied Bertha, "and from him I have heard that your tiltings are comely and gentle frays for knight and squire, but here you shall see two men grip and cling together like brute beasts. To my mind, gentles should use gentles' weapons, and leave such sport to the baser sort."

The words seemed to amuse the Spaniard moderately, so that he rocked in his saddle with mirth, but Sir Wilfred's champion shot an angry glance at him and muttered a curse on the "impu-

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dence of old Clotheram's wench." Although Jock affected not to hear the scorn put on them by the lady, yet his face and neck, even to his ears, took on a deep red. Then the angry flush died out, leaving him white and stern, boding ill for the man opposed to him.

In the struggle which followed the Hull man had all the advantages which age, weight and ponderous strength give in such a sport.

Even to lock his arms round such an immense girth seemed more than Jock might do. The Hull man took deep breaths and swelled out his great chest and sides to their utmost. A hogshead might as well be clasped. Himself so hard to hold, he took Jock into his bear-like hug and swung him off his feet.

But Jock had been schooled in all the tricks of the game, and when the giant, lifting him into the air, suddenly flung him off again, he alighted each time on his feet, dashing in upon his foe before he could recover from his great effort.

Four times did this happen till the Hull man began to puff and blow with his monstrous exertions. At the fourth time the Hermit muttered something in his pupil's ear as he staggered near him. Jock nodded and, jumping again to grasp his foe, lowered his head and planted it full in the fat man's stomach, who gasped and shrunk therewith into a smaller compass, giving Jock a better hold than he had yet been

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able to gain round his loins. Then, suddenly slipping his arms still lower to his thighs, with every muscle taut, he heaved and strained, and with another mighty effort threw him clear over his right shoulder, and the great man came down heavily upon his head and shoulder, and lay stunned in the dust.

CHAPTER IX

THE RAVISHMENT OF LADY BERTHA BY THE SPANIARD

A shout rent the air when the men of Rippon saw their champion suddenly victorious; but before it died away there arose a great commotion in the crowd round the ring, and men and horses began to sway about amidst excited and angry cries.

The Markenfields, father and son, had been closely intent upon the struggle, when Richard's horse, secretly pricked in the shoulder by the Spaniard's dagger, snorted and backed away from Bertha's side. When Richard succeeded in drawing him to the front again, he found he had exchanged places with the Spaniard, who was now next to the lady, shouting cries of encouragement to Jock. Then as the giant crashed to the ground there was a quick movement of the horses and persons between the two Markenfields, and before they had well grasped what was happening, Bertha was out of her own saddle and on the Spaniard's, closely clinging to him behind whilst he spurred hard to get clear of the crowd.

Though taken by surprise, Sir Ninian was soon aware that he was in danger of losing his ward by a

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craftily planned ravishment. Alert at last, he shouted directions to his mounted servants to rally round, and to the citizens to prevent the escape of the Spaniard.

But when men caught at the Spaniard's bridle in obedience to Sir Ninian, he made his horse rear so that they shrank from his hoofs, and his blade flashing out, threatened all who came his way. Those who were mounted, following Sir Ninian's directions, made straight for Horsefaire to cut off escape to the north, since the Spaniard was heading in that direction. But the Canon, leaning far out of the balcony, made his deep voice heard above all the din.

"Some to the North Brig; let Staveleys see to it and hold the bridge, and check him there; and others to Hewick, should he break that way. Between the bridges the flood will stop him; but guard the Skell."

Wherefore, when the Spaniard shook free of those who would stop him, and galloped hard to the other end of Holly Hill, where Horsefaire lies, he found an array of men on horse and foot all ready barring his path, so turning sharply he sent his horse in great leaps towards the Westgate corner and down Westgate, with a tumultuous crowd at his heels and cries of "Follow him close: he would get away by the Studley Road."

The black horse bore his double burden lightly and gallantly, and turned so deftly at the corner that he was some lengths ahead as he flashed past Bloxam-

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gate. Those in pursuit expected now he was making for Bishopton Bridge, and settled down to ride their hardest to overtake him before he could get away with his prize. Therefore a shout of triumph rang out down the street, when a little farther on the black shortened his stride, letting them come nearly up to him; and whip and spur were plied hard in the belief that the chase would soon be over.

But suddenly, at Ferriby Lane End, where the road goes down to the millstream of Skell, the Spaniard made a sudden leap to the left, so sudden a turn that his pursuers overshot the lane, and those behind, pressing on those in front, fell in such a tangle that the Spaniard had almost reached the bottom of the hill at the other end of the lane before they were half-way through it. Then, turning short again, he went splashing along the open millstream and out again into Water Skellgate.

Jock, panting over his fallen opponent, thought at first the shouts and uproar were for his victory, but looking up to see the Spaniard's horse carrying double and the great stir of people rushing away from the ring, soon became aware what the matter was.

For the moment the thought flashed into his head that here was a riddance of his friend Richard's troubles, with no need of aid from him, and, shrugging his shoulders, he was for taking Bertha's ravishment in cool unconcern.

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In this he had not reckoned with his uncle, who standing on the balcony, and stretching out in much excitement, had his eye upon him. "Shame on you, Jock, for a loiterer, when Sir Ninian needs every friend and lad of spirit. To him, I say, and aid in the pursuit with those long legs of thine."

And Jock, catching up his shirt and doublet, would have run towards Skellgate, but the Hermit took him by the arm.

"Nay, nay, lad, not that way, but to Ailcy Hill and watch there. Dost remember the boat? Go, and I will look to the Hull man," and he turned to the fallen wrestler, who was sitting up and passing his hand over his broken head.

At the Hermit's words daylight broke in on Jock's wandering wits, and clapping hand to head in sudden energy, he cried: "Ay, 'tis so."

"Then run your hardes' and wait not to horse yourself. As I am a true Christian 'tis you that shall earn Sir Ninian's thanks."

Half that he said was wasted on the air, for Jock was tearing down Kirkgate with points unfastened and struggling into his doublet as he ran.

Down the deserted street and past the Minster, where now not a soul was to be seen, and on to Ailcy Ings beyond he ran, until he reached the steep slope of the Mound, under which lay the mouldering bones of many a warrior that had fallen in the great affray of long ago.

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None cared to ascend that hill beneath its ghostly whispering trees when the sun went down ; but in the bright light of a summer's day Jock had no thought of shuddering shades as he sped up to its highest point.

From its top there was a clear view to the north and east, where the glistening Yore is turned abruptly by the steep side of Bell Bank, and flowing through rough and broken ways over a rocky bottom, or lingering in deeper pools, cometh to the point where Skell from south and west joins company with Yore.

And as Jock watched, recovering his breath and listening to the distant roar of the pursuit, there came the ringing of horse's hoofs past Bedern Bank into narrow St. Annesgate, and looking back from Ailcy to the south and west, Jock saw it was the Spaniard with Bertha behind, who, by crafty trick and the quick turning of the surefooted steed, had outdistanced and for a while thrown off the pursuit.

Round by the church, through St. Annesgate and on into Marygate, the gallant black, with his double load, galloping hard for a moment flashed into sight of a separate party, who had turned back down Kirkgate to cut him off from Hewick Bridge.

With a loud hallo these changed their course and swung to the left in pursuit, clattering fast down Stanbriggate ; and one galloped back to put the main body of pursuers on the track, who, bursting out of

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Skell Garths by twos, swept down the street with him in full cry to catch the ravisher before he could escape by the North Bridge.

Then did Jock reap the wisdom of his ascent to his watch tower, for at a bend in the street, where for a moment he was out of sight of his pursuers, the black horse turned suddenly off the road to the right, passing into a wooded dell by which flowed the little beck called Skitterdyke. Here they were hidden from the pursuit; but within sight of Jock on the hill Bertha's bright kirtle flashed in and out among the trees, and he, seeing now the line they were taking, ran quickly down the hill and straight for the river, reaching its banks a little lower down than did the Spaniard, and threw himself into hiding among the bushes that fringed the river. To him came the cries of men calling to one another from North Bridge, where they had overrun the scent, and from Hewick, where others had ridden to bar the lower bridge.

Hardly had he crept into cover when the Spaniard came riding down stream, so close that Jock made ready in his lurking place to spring out upon him and drag him down, but the black horse swerved suddenly out of reach and thundered by, the Spaniard looking sharply to the other bank and uttering cries of impatience.

But as he rode to where Skell comes into Yore, and on the farther side Bell Bank slopes into lower

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ground by Roman Riggs, a whistle sounded opposite, and from among the bushes a little boat shooting out came dancing down on the swollen flood, rowed by a man who strained with one oar on the farther side against the fierce current, and strove to bring it to the point where the Spaniard waited.

As soon as the Spaniard saw the boat he leaped to the ground, and lifted Bertha from the saddle. Then, leaving the horse tied to an oak sapling, they ran both down the bank and on to a tongue of land, where the Spaniard was able to seize the boat and draw it alongside. And with the utmost dispatch those two got aboard, sitting near the stern to steady the frail bark; and so small was it that there was barely room for the three, and Jock wondered that they could think it possible to reach the other side, until he looked and saw a rope rise tautening out of the water, fastened to the boat's head, and the other end held by a man, who had risen from the bushes; and still another stood ready with an arrow on his bowstring to let fly at anyone on the opposite bank who should seek to interfere with the fugitives.

At sight of him, Jock crouched lower, for he could not hope to deal with them thus armed, and yet he would not call to the other pursuers whilst any chance remained that, single-handed, he might recapture the maiden and so win Sir Ninian's thanks and all men's praise.

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So Bertha and the Spaniard sitting down in the boat, and the oarsman, so far as he might, staving her off from hidden rocks, they were drawn up hand over hand by the two on the bank. But this was not done without hard hauling and much peril to those in the boat as the strong flood hissed and gurgled against the bows.

But having brought them safe to land and helped them ashore, the archer and his fellow ran into the wood, and each came back leading a pair of saddled horses. After some debate and glances at the black horse left on the other side, the Spaniard shook his head decisively, and putting Bertha into the saddle, mounted another of the horses himself, and the others also mounting, they rode away up the hill and disappeared on the other side.

Meanwhile Jock's thoughts had been busy, and no sooner had the riders disappeared over the ridge than he leapt up and ran to the tethered black, and loosing him, sprang into the saddle.

Now a stone's cast higher up there was a place where the stream shallowed, and except in time of flood, as now, there was a broad pebbly islet. But at this time over the most of it rushed broken water, a few yards only standing out, whilst between it and the Rippon side of the river the main volume flowed deep and strong, resistless in its might.

Jock would have thought little of plunging into it, trusting to be carried by the current and his own

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strong arms to the other side, had it not been necessary that he should reach it with a swift horse beneath him to overtake the fugitives.

Approaching the bank, therefore, he for a little measured the distance with his eye. Then turning inland, he rode gently away, gradually increasing his pace and sweeping round again until he was galloping straight for the bank where the islet was.

And as they came opposite the bank where the black could sight the little patch of isle beyond the deep water, Jock drove him hard at it, digging in his heel and pricking his left side with his dagger. At the sudden sting the black leapt out convulsively into the stream. But jumping a little short, for the distance was great, his forelegs only rested on the isle, and his haunches sank, despite his struggles, into the deeper stream; and then, the current tearing him away, he began to float rapidly down.

But whilst the horse hung doubtfully on the edge Jock had scrambled over his neck, and now stood ankle deep only in the water, grasping the bridle and encouraging the black with hand and voice. And as the horse slipped down stream he followed it on the islet edge, and before he came to the end of it he was able to stretch out and thrust his hand into the girth below the saddle, and by dint of his great strength he aided the horse to get a footing at the lower end, which, with much ado, it succeeded in

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doing, and then stood snorting and shivering, with the rushing water washing against its legs.

But the worst of the effort was past, for the current between the islet and the far side was shallower and less violent, and so, splashing and swimming, the two came to the bank, and there Jock got the black up upon the firm land.

But it was not the pure black horse which went into the water that came out of it. For there was a star on his forehead, and the hock of the left foreleg had a white stocking, so that the horse stood revealed as that which Mallory oft rode, famous for his speed and sureness of foot.

At that Jock rejoiced. He had a hard ride before him, and badly needed a swift steed and a sure to come up with those ahead. So far, not many minutes had been lost since they rode away over the hill, and Jock was soon mounted in pursuit.

As he topped the ridge and looked across to Sharow and beyond to Blois Hill, with its clusters of trees, which can be seen from all the country to the north of Copt Hewick, he caught sight of the four riders on the skyline.

Mallory, then, had been too crafty to follow the road through Sharow towards York, but was making for the open moor, so as to gain, it seemed, the shelter of Hutton Conyers Hall.

That, at least, was Jock's guess. Yet he resolved to leave naught to chance, and with a good horse

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beneath him to keep them in sight, bidding his time. And coming to Pillmoor Carr, where a track leads off to Hutton, he looked that way first and drew rein in perplexity, for there could be seen two horses galloping hard for Hutton and two men astride one horse.

But not for long was Jock at a loss, for ahead, riding over the open moor of Hutton, was another party of two, and it became plain that at Pillmoor the Spaniard and Bertha had separated from the other three men. Yet where they were going was hard to conjecture, since that course led away from Hutton and Studley and even from York, where they might have sheltered, and pointed straight for the trackless wilderness of the Hambleton Hills, some fifteen miles away.

Leaving that riddle to be solved later, Jock rode on, but cautiously keeping under cover that no backward glance might reveal him to the Spaniard. In that way he came to that gruesome place, shunned by the people of the moor, where is a great circle of grassy mound, haunt of elves, or worse, some folks said, though wiser men believed that there British people had once dwelt in a strong earthen castle.

Even Jock in his eager pursuit was not hardy enough to enter this place out of dread what spell might be cast upon him, but coasting round its outer slopes, passed on over the moor.

Now it could be seen that the two riders whom Jock kept twice a flight-shot ahead of him, although

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they rode at less speed than before, no longer fearing a close pursuit, yet avoided all roads that might take them past habitations, and in this way they left Rainton to the right as they descended towards the Swale above Topcliffe.

Here Jock had to stay in concealment of the wood fringing the river, whilst the Spaniard rode farther up stream to find a ford, not daring, it seemed, to pass by the bridge under the stronghold of the Maiden Bower, but going cautiously and keeping to woodland tracks out of sight of men. After Topcliffe they spurred their horses to a better pace, until they came to the Cod Beck and turned again northwards, skirting the lands of Thirkelby Manor, but avoiding Thirsk Castle on the farther side.

By this they had ridden from Rippon some two hours, but so deviously and carefully in the latter part that, as the crow flies, they had come but some four leagues, and before them now rose the dark heights of the Hambletons, with Rouston Crag and the white rocks of the Grey Mare Crag over Gormire standing out to right and left.

But to avoid the quagmires in front of Osgodby they had to fetch a compass, which brought them past Balk and into the road beyond Sutton.

Finding it easy here to track the hoof marks in the soft earth, if he lost sight of the riders, Jock dismounted to cut a stout oak sapling, and with his dagger shaped it into a six-foot quarter-staff in as

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much haste as he could, and then remounting, rode hard to make up the time he had lost.

So riding in haste and with lessened care, since the moss-grown woodland path deadened the trampling of his horse, he turned abruptly into the road by Sutton and was near overrunning his quarry, for they had slackened speed; but drawing back under cover, he waited until the sound of their hoof-beats died away.

And starting out again, before he had gone many yards, there, in the midst of the road, lay a wallet, newly dropped, that he had seen before strung at the Spaniard's back.

Dismounting, Jock was about to examine the contents when a clatter coming down the road told him of one or both returning on their track, having missed the wallet.

So, leaving it where it lay, he drew back again into the wood, and soon his heart rejoiced at seeing the Spaniard alone searching the road as he went. Here was the chance for which he had longed.

In his right hand, gripping the oak sapling, he spurred into the midst of the road to confront the Spaniard, whose sword in a moment flew out of its sheath; and crying out a Spanish oath, the ravisher rode down the hill upon his opponent.

"Come on, Sir Wilfred," cried Jock, whirling his staff. "I know you for what you are, no Spaniard,

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but a trickster, and a ravisher of Sir Ninian's ward, whom I am come to deliver."

Then Mallory, seeing disguise useless, was in no way abashed, but cried out, in great glee, "Nothing is better to my mind, O sad-faced deliverer of gentle maidens, than to cross swords with you; but put up your clumsy club and draw sword like a gentleman."

"I have no sword, and this will serve as well to break your pate," returned Jock, giving it another twirl above his horse's head.

CHAPTER X

HOW BERTHA WAS TRAITOROUSLY WEDDED IN THE HAPPY VALLEY

FOR the first time that day Bertha was alone with her thoughts, and for the first time in her life she had doubts about what she had done, doubts that were almost fears.

Fears came not easily to her. Hardihood in full measure she had from the old adventurer her father, and with it obstinacy and self-will. She loved liberty, she used to say, and by liberty she meant that none should thwart and all should serve her slightest whim.

By that law she had lived her sixteen summers, wild and free, her mother having died at her birth, until came Markenfield and laid his constraining hand on her liberty. Then she found herself disposed of like one of her own cattle. She who had ruled servant and hind by her caprice, must now be at the bidding of others.

There had been a stormy scene when Markenfield carried her off to the Hall for safety. He had not scrupled to use force when she scornfully refused to go, and she had fought like a wild cat, biting and

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tearing at all who laid hands on her, until they put her across a horse and a grizzled man-at-arms held her fast in front of him, laughing at her struggles.

When they lifted her down she was no longer violent; but, exhausted and pale, she stalked through the gate by herself, refusing the hand which young Markenfield offered.

She was quite calm and self-controlled after that. As Sir Ninian came fussing round her next day, excusing himself on the plea of necessity, she laughed in his face.

"No more of that, Sir Ninian; a wayward girl you brought from Clotheram: a true daughter of Ralph Clotheram and a woman ye shall find me at Markenfield."

With that, whatever it might mean, he had to be content. She was dumb when he would have debated the matter further; but from her cheerfulness henceforth he boded well for final success in bending her to his will. It was true that she kept a bitter tongue, and young Richard suffered most from its lash; but she showed no aloofness from the pursuits of the Markenfield House, and was ever ready to ride out with hawk and hound in Sir Ninian's company, enjoying with zest all kinds of field sports.

Yet under all her will was unbroken, only she sought more secret and devious ways to it. When Mallory, hovering near, stooped like a hawk to the

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encounter as fortune brought the chance, she showed no coyness, but rather was eager to use him for thwarting Markenfield's designs; and it may be that Sir Wilfred's bold eyes and gallant mien had beside some fascination for her.

Thus, with no thought of any ill that might befall herself, but only how she might compass the confusion of her oppressors, she offered little resistance to the plans that Mallory made for carrying her off from under the nose of Sir Ninian; and when the time for action came, her blood was thrilled with the excitement of the escape and the pursuit.

Now evening was drawing on. Grey Mare Crag on the left, Roulston and Hood to the right, seemed to reach out with their aged, shaggy arms to enfold her in the bosom of their wilderness. The scene around was gloomy and menacing. Alone and amidst such surroundings, for a little while her bold spirits and stiff-necked temper quailed and yielded to more timid thoughts.

When the loss of the wallet was discovered, they were in the act of diverging from the road by a narrow path descending slantwise through a fringe of trees, and under Mailory's brief directions before he galloped back, she rode forward at a walk until the track brought her into an open glade.

Here, in a deep hollow known to the country round as the Happy Valley, sheltered by hill and cliff on all sides but on that by which Bertha ap-

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proached, was an open space, at the farther end of which, right beneath the steep sides of Roulston and flanked by the rounded heights of Hood Hill, nestled a little chapel.

That, with some low, half-ruined buildings, was all that was left of the brief home of the monks of Calder after their flight to Thirsk in turbulent times, when Gundreda, heiress of the Mowbrays in the castle of Thirsk, succoured and gave them shelter.

Long ago they had left it for the better lands and pastures of Byland, but still for generations monk had succeeded monk in serving the little solitary chapel for the people of the wild regions around.

The chapel nestled under the very edge of the Hambleton fastnesses, and had withstood many a foray of the lawless hill folk into the plain of Mowbray; its priests had ministered both to the villagers of the plains and to the outlaws of the hills, giving the viaticum to many a soldier wounded to death, whom his comrades left behind in the hurry of their flight to their mountain retreat.

Here to-day was a little peaceful nook, tree-surrounded, with the chapel in sight at its far end, where the afternoon sunshine fell athwart the sward, and tired bees returning with their load from the heather bloom of the hill-slopes made a drowsy hum.

Coming to a stand, Bertha let the reins slide

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down her nag's neck, whilst he bent to crop the short sweet grass. The minutes passed and grew towards half an hour, but Mallory came not. She, in a black mood, and each moment growing more uneasy, drew up her steed's reluctant head and turned into the belt of trees to make her way back to the road.

A few moments sufficed to bring her through the trees, but ere this the sound of many hoofs pounding along the road, with the jingle of harness and creaking of leather, broke upon her. Emerging on the road she saw Mallory himself riding up the hill from Sutton, behind him two pairs of horsemen close together, and far in the rear another rider, who appeared to be not of the same company, and came on at a slower pace. Glad was Bertha at the sight of Sir Wilfred, who, coming up to her, showed the wallet in his hand; but abating little of his pace, with a brief word turned into the path leading to the glade.

"On!" cried he, riding bunched up strangely in his cloak, his hat drawn over his brows, "on, since the priest awaits us," and said naught of where and how he found the wallet and who they were that rode behind.

But Bertha, knowing beforehand that men were coming from Sutton to guard them from the sudden attack of pursuers, thought that these were they. Therefore she asked no questions, and in a few

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minutes they had come to the low door of the little chapel lying under the cliffs. Hearing the tramp of horses approaching, a priest came out and led them into the dim interior.

Mallory spoke no more to Bertha, but, drawing the priest away into a corner, held whispered talk with him; after which he took her hand and stood with her before the priest at the altar steps. And he, opening his book, made ready to begin. Meanwhile, the sounds of approaching voices and gusts of laughter came through the porch, and soon four of the other five horsemen dismounted and filed into the chapel. The tallest of them, a man of great height and girth, to Bertha's wonder took his place at her side; for she recognised him, though now in sallet and jack, as the wrestler who had been thrown by Jock Draglea, looking none the worse for his fall but for a linen bandage that was seen when he removed his steel cap.

"Be not mazed, lady," he said in answer to her look of surprise, "my head is thick, and my fall at Rippon served a purpose, since it drew men's eyes away, enabling Sir Wilfred to carry you off out of the press. After that, making for the tryst at Sutton, I rode at my best pace hither to play the father, as I had agreed with Mallory, to give you away to your loving groom."

Now all the time that he spoke, Mallory had his back turned to him.

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"Is this your will?" said Bertha, trying to see his face. But he still averted it, replying in haste and thickly :

"Ay, ay, it is as he says. I told Sir, Sir——"

"Sir Andrew," prompted the giant, laughing. "By my faith, lady, your charms have addled your lover's wits, and he cannot remember his comrade's name."

For some reason the other three men took these words as an excellent jest, for they broke suddenly into a loud guffaw, which was at once checked by a look from Sir Andrew.

Mallory fidgeted and kept a sullen silence, whilst the others, with little respect for his authority, looked on him in much amusement.

The fat Sir Andrew, too, was merry, until, his glance falling on Bertha, wondering and perplexed, he dropped his eyes as though abashed, and when raising them again, looked on her in a different fashion. Then striding to Sir Wilfred's side, he clapped him roughly on his shoulder, saying :

"Look you, Master Bridegroom, be kind to the maiden, and frown her no frowns, else will I not give her to you."

Sir Wilfred twisted his shoulder angrily from Sir Andrew's grasp, and said gruffly :

"Rest you content. She shall be fair entreated."

Yet Sir Andrew continued to look half doubtful

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and half amused at him for a while, and then, shaking his head, he stepped back into his place, saying: "Well, well, worse things might befall her," and at that the monk began reading from his book.

Little of his sing-song tones was audible to Bertha, for never was so restless a congregation, with their stamping and coughing and jingling of harness, to drown the priest's words. And when he came to ask them both whether they would take one another to be man and wife, the clatter of the restless soldiers was worse than ever, and at this point Sir Wilfred dropped the steel scabbard of his sword, which he had been holding loose in his left hand, upon the stone steps. At that Sir Andrew could not restrain himself.

"A clumsy bridegroom is this, Master Priest. Sir Wilfred, you need not drop your sword to search for the ring, which I have here, as I promised. Be ready with it, man, when it comes to the point, and you, lady, with the right finger."

Sir Wilfred muttered something in a thick voice, but the priest, disregarding the noise, pattered on apace, not pausing for response from groom or bride, so that they had reached the end before Bertha, amazed and bewildered by the strange manners of Sir Wilfred and Sir Andrew, and distracted by these interruptions, was aware that she was firmly bound in wedlock to the man at her side and the ring drawn over her finger.

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The couple wedded, Sir Wilfred's comrades drew to one side for him and his bride to pass out, and Sir Andrew, now with a cloud upon his brow, followed them into the grassy glade before the chapel.

Out into the warm light came Lady Bertha, her bridegroom by her side. And there, with the westering sun shining full upon his face, where he stood right in their path, was another Sir Wilfred Mallory, and without doubt the real one, his Spanish beard thrown off, the dark hue washed from his fair face, and his head bare of any covering.

Amazed and distraught, Bertha glanced fearfully at the tall figure that stalked by her side, and he, pulling the beard from his chin and the cloak from his shoulders, stood revealed, with a dark flush on his shamed face, plain to all as Jock Draglea, now by the priest's office become her man and lord.

And all at once the laughter and the jesting died out in the ring of men standing round Bertha, and they shifted uneasily on their feet, and one shrank behind the big body of Sir Andrew.

And there was a curious silence, whilst she, her eyes widely distended, began to shoot shafts of scorn that seemed to wither up all upon whom they fell, until she turned them last upon the real Mallory, who stood careless and unabashed.

"So, villain and traitor! you have wrought a trusting maiden's undoing!"

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Sir Wilfred folded his arms and threw his shoulders back.

"And you? Were you sick with love when you fled with me, or panting with revenge on Sir Ninian? Well, you have your desire. Sir Ninian is tricked."

"And I by you! God's blight upon you. Why have I been thus cozened?"

"Lay it at Draglea's door. His cursed meddling has done it."

Jock, his hands crossed on his sword hilt, stood with eyes bent upon the ground, and said slowly: "I followed you and Sir Wilfred in pursuit from Rippon. Half a league back I came upon him alone. We fought and——"

"He struck me to my knees by a shrewd stroke," broke in Mallory, "and there was I at the mercy of his dagger. A small thing to die, you would say. Even so; but I have work to do before death may come." He paused, and for a little seemed to forget what was passing, with his eyes fixed on the distant hills, and Sir Andrew and his three comrades exchanged secret looks. Then Mallory resumed the matter of his speech.

"I say Draglea had me at his mercy, and I offered to bargain with him. It seemed he had a fancy for your hand, Lady Bertha. Why, I have not been able to discover."

Bertha flashed a furious look at him, and Jock said gruffly to her:

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"It was for Richard Markenfield, my friend, since Sir Ninian was forcing him into marriage with you. Richard dared not say nay. Now if I married you——"

"God's truth ! Then a plague on you, man, why not let me ?" broke in Mallory.

"You would then have had her dowry, which falls in neither with Richard's nor Sir Ninian's views."

"And if you married her ?"

"The dowry would be mine as Lady Bertha's husband, and I could give it to Richard."

"Heaven help us !" ejaculated Sir Andrew. "What a friend !"

"Rather, what a sorry knave !" burst out Bertha.

Mallory, giving no heed to her rage, said to Jock :

"Without Sir Ninian's part of the indenture you cannot get the dowry from the merchant at Hull."

"I shall not be without it," replied Jock, tapping the wallet, which he had slung over his shoulders. "I have looked into this, Sir Wilfred, and read the document that it contains."

Mallory looked crestfallen. "I had not suspected you of so much Latin," he grumbled. "This comes of dealing with Canons' nephews."

Sir Andrew put in a word :

"Methinks, Master Draglea is a thought too much

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assured of success. We are four at your back, Sir Wilfred, and even Draglea's powers with the quarter-staff could not dispose of all of us."

Jock, as they began to close in upon him, drew his sword and put himself on guard.

"Sir Wilfred, you will not permit this. I have fought for the maiden and fairly won her. If the indenture is now in question, let us fight again for that, and this time, if you will, with swords."

Mallory said quickly, "Agreed. Friends, give me a sword, and see fair play."

"We could desire nothing better," said Sir Andrew. "You are a bonny wrestler, lad; but with the sword Sir Wilfred has all the tricks of Italian fence, and I have never yet seen the man who could stand before him."

Bertha looked contemptuously at him.

"This husband of mine that you have given me is fool as well as knave, methinks."

"I care not for the odds," said Jock stoutly. "I am ready here and now to fight with Sir Wilfred."

The girl gave a hard, derisive laugh, driving back her tears of mortification.

"The fires of hell light you both for the trick and shame ye have put upon a maid. God grant each may slay the other. But if only one is to fall, I know not whose death I shall pray for. Ye are both hardy villains. Yet is one, it seems, my husband."

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"Then should you pray for my success," said Sir Wilfred mockingly, "for it will release you. Hear you that, Draglea? It should give strength to our arms and edge to our steel to know a fair lady looks on our prowess with such loving care for our welfare."

"But before you kill me, Sir Wilfred," said Jock, carrying on the grim jest, "I will do my best to please a loving wife, by mortal thrust against her next best hated foe."

"So be it," said Mallory, a look of content on his face.

Sir Andrew meanwhile was manœuvring to place Mallory with his back to the sinking sun, but he scorned such an advantage.

"Let the sun be thwartwise," he said, "then will neither be dazzled."

The change of position brought Jock for a moment nearer Bertha. For the first time he looked her in the face.

"This is my third combat to-day, wife of mine. The first brought me mere honour, the second a wife, and now the prize will be hard gold."

"Oh, what a fall is there!" she replied with bitter taunt. "From honour through a wife to base greed."

"And you will not give me God-speed?"

"That will I. God-speed in ridding earth of the base cozeners opposite."

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"Thanks for that."

"And God give thee speedy death thyself and deliverance to me."

Jock bowed his head and looked across at his foe. Mallory nodded to him.

"We must each strive to pleasure your gentle wife, Draglea. She is dainty in her desires. Old Clotheram has bred her true to be such a maid at her tender age. Now, Sir Andrew, are we placed and ready?"

Then the giant gave the word and the fight began.

Not many minutes had passed after the crossing of their swords before Jock knew that all he had learned of sword play from his uncle, the stout old warrior of Flodden, was useless against his opponent's more finished skill. His sword flickered in and out in passes and foins that Jock had not dreamt of. Sweat poured down his face in superhuman efforts to make up by sheer strength of wrist and natural quickness of eye for the surpassing skill of his foe.

Panting with his exertions, after just parrying a swift lunge of Mallory's, he paused for a moment, and Mallory at once lowered his point.

"Sir Andrew, stand between us with your blade for a brief parley. Draglea, this time you are at my mercy. But I am thinking there is little profit to be got by striking home, unless your wife would take me for her second husband and go with me to Hull with the indenture."

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"I would liever be wife to the foulest hind that crouches in a hovel than to thee, traitor," hissed Bertha.

"So? Then that way is closed. Still, Draglea, if I take your life, as I can, neither wife nor indenture will be of much use to you. Then listen. You shall have the maiden and your life for the gold, which she and you shall fetch from Hull and give to me. Your bare word will suffice."

Jock shook his head. "It may be that you will kill me, but you shall not have the dowry. If I die, it shall be the Lady Bertha's to bestow on another husband, whom she may choose. Sir Andrew, stand aside."

The end came quickly. Almost at the first pass Sir Wilfred's point seemed to become engaged in Jock's hilt, and by a quick twist the latter's sword was sent flying out of his hand. The next moment, with a recovery and a lightning lunge, Mallory's blade passed through Jock's side and stood out a foot from his doublet at the back. A spasm twisted the face of the wounded man as he felt the sting of the steel; then, setting his teeth, he threw his weight forward, and closing his empty hand he dealt a crushing blow with all the might of his fist upon his opponent's jaw, and Mallory went down backwards on the turf with Jock astride of him.

The bystanders rushed forward to save Mallory, but Jock, reaching for his fallen sword and planting

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one foot on his enemy's breast, cried out unsteadily, with Mallory's hilt still hanging at his ribs, "Stand off. The fight is mine, and my point is at Sir Wilfred's throat."

Mallory's senses quickly came back to him, and he gasped out, "Let no one interfere. Draglea is the victor, and I yield to him."

But as he spoke, Jock swayed about and fell across his foe's prostrate body, raining blood upon him.

Running up, they lifted him off, whilst Sir Andrew drew out Mallory's sword, and the chapel priest, thrusting his hand under Jock's shirt, said that his heart was still faintly beating. Then between them they carried him to the little hermitage near the chapel, and Bertha, white of face, followed with Mallory, still in his blood-stained shirt.

And when they had stripped Jock's body bare, they found that Mallory's sword striking on a rib had glanced aside, scoring a long surface wound with much letting of blood.

When this was known Sir Wilfred and his huge comrade said they were passing glad, although the former had done his utmost to compass Jock's death. But the monk shook his head.

"He is not yet well of his hurt," he said. "He hath bled much and there is fever to follow."

By nightfall Jock was in a parching heat and thirst, crying out with wandering wits and struggling so violently that two men had much ado to hold him

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down on the pallet. All the while Bertha sat in a low chair hard by, her chin resting on her two hands and her great eyes fixed upon Jock.

"The hard-hearted wench waits for his death to know that she is free," grumbled Sir Andrew, "but the lad who could throw me will yet give Death a fall and disa, point her."

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF SUTTON BANK

TOWARDS dawn the fever abated and a weakness came over Jock, so that he lay still muttering incessantly, and the priest alone stayed by his side, with Bertha nodding in her chair. But the others took what rest they might in the ruined buildings without.

At daybreak, when it grew light, Mallory strode in at the entrance, haggard of look, a black scowl on his face, now discoloured with the blow that Jock had given him. He cast a glance at Bertha's drooping head. "A dutiful wife," he sneered, "watching over her good man."

She lifted her head defiantly.

"Outside among robbers and deceivers forsworn was no place for me. Here I am under the shelter of the good priest, the only honest man of this company."

But Mallory was not listening to her reply. He had lost all the gaiety he had shown in the fight, and his eyes were red with watching.

"Those that were lying near Byland have not come in, as we expected, nor made any sign. We must needs wait here for them, or they may be cut off by

Joek o' Rippon

Sir Ninian or by Mowbray from Thirsk. He is on the watch and may well have smelt out the Byland matter. Whether they come or not, I have naught for my pains in carrying you off. What if I send you back to Markenfield?"

Bertha shot scorn out of her eyes.

"Ay, traitor, and what tale shall I bear with me? Did ye devise one, ye two plotters?"

Mallory knitted his brows in perplexity.

"But if they search us out here we be too few to meet them. Braithwaite went yesternight to fetch up Sir Andrew's men from Ryedale, but still we be too few if Sir Ninian comes in force. Should he raise the country against us, we must retreat into the Hambletons. Then what shall we do with you and with him?" pointing to the truckle-bed.

"You have said it. Leave us to the scant mercies of Sir Ninian, mad at the loss of my dower," replied Bertha in disdain. "That comes not amiss to a trickster."

Mallory looked sourly at her.

"'Twas Draglea only who brought us to this pass. 'Twould be best if he died of his wound. 'Tis best to save a vast amount of trouble after."

Bertha's black brows contracted.

"I know not which of you three I hate most," she cried. "Sir Ninian for his oppression or your base deceit, or him"—pointing to the man—"for his witless meddling."

The Battle of Sutton Bank

"I doubt I am the back-," retorted Mallory. "To let him keep the indenture when he is in my power, and I could at least squeeze out a price for it."

"Trickery, again. Ye fought for it and he won."

"Sir Andrew will have it that in sooth I was the victor, having beaten him by skill of sword."

"Then why cry mercy and yield?"

"Ah, why?" said Mallory, shaking his head. "It seems I was of a different mind then, loving gallantry in the fight. It is ever so with men of the fiend and the angel within, now the angel, now the other, but mostly the fiend, for he has a mortgage on the house and bides his time: he bides his time. From that Mallory came a gloomy reflection, going up and down and giving no further notice of Bertha."

The morning broke dark and lowering, and soon there was the sound of rain pattering on forest leaves. An hour later a troop of horsemen came down the steep descent of the Grey Mare Crag under Braithwaite's lead, and greetings were exchanged by those with Mallory and the giant knight. The men were at once posted to guard the approaches of the Happy Valley, and high up on Hood Hill two kept watch upon the road from Byland and that which came up from Thirsk; for both of these were commanded from that height. Now on the ground between the roads there was small need of guards, for here the waters of the

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Hood Beck spread out into a swamp that made approach that way impossible, but the most part were placed towards the north and west, where an enemy might attack by the ascent from Sutton.

Sir Andrew and Mallory went uneasily to and fro, and from time to time messengers came in from the outposts. There was an expectant and alert air about everyone.

Soon after mid-day one of the two posted on Hood Hill came leaping down the rocky path in hot haste, and the two leaders hastened forward to receive his tale.

"All is well," he panted. "Our men from Byland have been sighted, and there is a sixth with them on the spare horse."

The faces of the leaders cleared at once.

"They will get through, then," said Sir Andrew, "and it seems they have netted their fish."

As he spoke, there came another shout from above, and the second scout hurried down with further news.

"Another company comes by the western road, galloping hard between Thirsk and Sutton."

At that Mallory muttered a curse and sent a rider to spy out who they were, and another to order the line of outposts to draw in from the north, and soon all were gathering in the chapel glade.

"How many did ye note?" said Sir Andrew to the scout from the hill.

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"Some score in front, and a second body behind carrying the Mowbray banner. There are twice as many, and all in appearance well armed."

"And we but twenty-five," said Sir Andrew to Mallory. "There is naught for it but retreat to the hills, Sir Wilfred, as soon as your party from Byland comes in. I will send at once on foot by the secret way through the swamp to warn them to come between Hood and Roulston that they fall not into the hands of Sir Ninian. We must hold the hill road till then."

Mallory nodded his head. Together they strode quickly to the hermitage door, where their horses were tied, and Mallory said, "The maiden? What of her?"

"Sir Ninian will take her back. She must make peace with him as best she may. Do you go in and tell her."

But Bertha, hearing the stir, had come out quietly, and heard what had passed.

"Ye may run away as fast as ye will," said she. "Stay not for me, nor for the wounded man."

Sir Andrew turned to her with one foot in the stirrup. "It is no shame for twenty-five to retreat before twice their number, but if ye will brook the hardships of the hills, we will take you with us, and your man that now is may risk his life, if so he choose, on a led horse."

Jock o' Rippon

Mallory looked questioningly at her and said, "It shall be as you will, though——"

But she turned her back on them.

"He and I will stay," she threw at them over her shoulder, and vanished through the doorway of the hermitage.

A fresh disposition of forces was now made, and Sir Andrew, gathering together all but three, whom he left with Mallory, rode out to hold off the advancing troops of Sir Ninian Markenfield and Mowbray, and it was not long before the noise of the battle was heard in the direction in which they had gone.

Mallory remained behind prancing up and down the glade and breaking into great oaths, whilst he cast anxious glances up the valley to the south.

Soon the shouts and the clash of steel grew louder, for Sir Andrew's defence, in spite of desperate fighting, was beginning to be rolled back up the road towards the Hambleton Scars. Again Mallory sent a messenger up the Hill of Hood, and impatiently watched him clamber to the top, make a quick survey, and return in long leaps down the slope to his side.

"Our party are even now in the pass between Hood and Roulston, unseen by the enemy. If Sir Andrew can hold out a short space longer, they will win safely through to us."

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"Then go you all," said Mallory to his three men, "and support Sir Andrew, and tell him that, come what may, he must hold the road until he hear my whistle." And so they, too, rode away, leaving Sir Wilfred now alone, and still the noise of battle grew louder and nearer.

For Sir Andrew was hard beset on the hill-side. Higher up indeed was steeper and more difficult ground, where a better defence might have been made by a few against many. But if he fell back so far he would expose the chapel glade to entry by the foe and the party from Byland to capture in consequence.

With his own hand he had struck down two of the opposing force, but three of his followers lay with arrows in throat or body, and two others sorely wounded could barely sit their horses to bear a hand in the fray.

And now with dismay he saw a party of the foe stealing round to outflank him on the north, a movement which he could easily have baffled had it been possible to fall back. Each moment he expected to find himself surrounded and cut off from retreat to the Hambletons, when to his joy Mallory's whistle was heard, and he gladly gave the order to retire up the hill, remaining himself, with three of his stoutest men, to hold the road and cover the retreat of the others.

With these three he charged down upon the foe,

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and for a time, by their mere impetus and daring, they dashed aside or drove them pell-mell down the slope. Then before their scattered foes could recover from disorder, they turned their horses' heads sharply round and plunged through again, leaving this time two of their number on the ground. But though Sir Andrew and the survivors had to continue their flight up the hill, with no thought of further resistance, they had effected their purpose. The check had given the others time to retire. The Byland party were foremost in the retreat at the top of the cliff.

Up the rugged, twisting path the two bands pressed their struggling, slipping steeds, with their pursuers now hard upon their heels, but some in front had now clambered up the steep face of the cliff that skirted and overhung the path, and were discharging flights of arrows, with here and there an arquebus, into the thick of the pursuers, emptying several saddles and again checking the pursuit, which soon, however, swept on again, and both pursuers and pursued disappeared beyond the summits of the cliffs.

Down in the chapel glade stood Bertha and the priest at the hermitage door, gazing upwards at the fight above them.

They watched Sir Andrew's gallant defence; they saw the Byland party ride in furious haste past the chapel and up the hill-side with a crouching figure

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on a horse between two of them. They saw the defenders' last effort, and then their headlong flight into the heart of the Hambletons.

Then the priest went back to tend the wounded Jock, and Bertha went with him.

CHAPTER XII

MAN AND WIFE ON ONE HORSE TO HULL

THAT day and others passed. The priest was skilful in surgery, and Jock young and strong. His wound, since the sword had made a clean cut in his side, mended with marvellous quickness, though loss of blood still kept him on his back. He was as yet too weak to walk, and he had no horse to carry him back to Rippon. Bertha said that nothing but the want of a horse kept her there too, since she had resolved, with or without Sir Ninian's will, to shut herself up in the Manor of Clotheram, where now, since she came of age, she was lawful mistress.

That was how she talked to the priest, meaning it, however, for Jock's ear, while she did her part in cooking savoury messes out of such materials as the priest could find. Meanwhile Sir Ninian and Sir Christopher chased the outlaws into the wilderness of the Hambletons, and lost them in its forest gorges. Then finding their men picked off one by one by unseen archers they extricated themselves from the trackless wilds, bringing their wounded by slow stages back into the vale of Mowbray.

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When Mallory had escaped the hue and cry by crossing the Yore at an unguarded point, much time had been lost in hunting to and fro. It was Matthew the hermit who finally set them on the right line by the discovery of his boat fastened up near Roman Riggs and of hoof marks on either side of the river bank. It was not difficult to follow the track from this point onwards, but before the pursuit could be started, night was coming on and it was deferred until the next morning.

Proofs that several were concerned in carrying off the maiden made it only prudent to follow in force. Therefore on the morrow, at the earliest possible hour, a company of a score set forth, who tracked the fugitives to the foot of the Hambletons. Some had turned aside to Thirsk for information and help from Mowbray there.

Sir Christopher had come with the party. An uncle's concern in the disappearance of Jock was a natural excuse for riding with them. The disturbed state of those parts was reason enough for the wearing of sallet and sword that had been rusting on the wall of the Canon's house since Flodden. And he had borne his part manfully by his old comrade Sir Ninian's side in the battle on the hill.

It was in Sutton town on their return a week later from chasing the raiders that Sir Christopher got news of a wounded man lying at the hermitage, and

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he was convinced by the description that it was his nephew.

And so the Canon turned back in company with the Markenfields, father and son, and came into the chapel glade, and there the priest, meeting them, brought them within where Jock lay resting on the truckle-bed, and Bertha sat near.

All three rejoiced to see Jock, and most of all the Canon, that his nephew was alive and safe. The presence of Lady Bertha was proof that Jock had succeeded in the mission on which he had sent him and had rescued the maiden.

But when the Canon would have fallen on his neck and embraced him, Jock Draglea, sitting stiffly up, put both his hands against him and thrust him from him.

"Hold off, Sir Christopher, until you have heard me, and when you have, I fear your greeting will be of another sort."

Bertha, too, rose erect, and met Sir Ninian's questions with a defiant look.

But the knight laughed joyously.

"Come, you naughty shrew. All has ended well, has it not? Here's young Jock, wounded, it is true, but you safe in his charge and with the good priest here. Jock was too cunning for your Spaniard, else he would have taken you with him into the hills. The Spaniard did I say? Mallory rather. They are one and the same."

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Before she could reply, Jock had spoken :

"You are wrong, Sir Ninian. The Spaniard who carried off your ward from Holly Hill was not Mal-lory, but a leader of the Hambleton raiders, who have disturbed the country of late. You do wrong in putting this felony on Sir Wilfred. The Lady Bertha will confirm me in what I say."

Bertha looked at Jock amazed and confused, and then collecting herself, replied firmly :

"That is truth, Sir Ninian. The outlaw called the Mad Monk tried to carry me off to hold me for ransom, and Sir Wilfred is not concerned in it."

Sir Ninian looked from one to the other in disbelief.

"But he himself wrote that he would carry her off on St. Wilfrid's Day."

This time Bertha had the readiest wit.

"Sir Wilfred has ever been known as a brag-gart. That was a jest put upon you."

Sir Ninian knitted his brows.

"And who was it that bound me in the lime-burner's hut and stole the papers in my casket?"

It was Jock's turn to answer, was the message conveyed by Bertha's eyes to him; her invention had run dry.

"That, no doubt, was the work of the raiders," said Jock. "Perhaps, Sir Ninian, they meant to

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take you away and hold you to ransom like the others."

"Such as the Abbot of Byland, who was carried off, 'tis thought, by them two days ago, when he was returning from a visit to Rievaulx," said Sir Christopher.

"We have heard of that even here," said Jock gravely. "Nay, Sir Ninian, I ought to know about this matter, for I followed the Spaniard and fought with him, getting this wound." He paused and then said slowly and distinctly: "We fought, I say, for the possession of the Lady Bertha of Clotheram. I won the battle, and an hour later the priest here wedded us."

"Wedded whom?" cried Sir Ninian in utter bewilderment. "Hear you this, Sir Christopher?"

"Are you mad?" broke in the Canon sternly.

"I say the priest made me, John Draglea and Bertha of Clotheram, man and wife."

"Give the lie to this impudent knave," shouted the Canon to the maiden.

"Again I cannot. What he says is true," said she. "Ask the priest here."

The knight and the Canon turned speechless to him. The priest, at the looks they cast on him, trembled, as he replied:

"I had a letter sealed with the seal of His Grace of York commanding me to join in lawful wedlock, as soon as they presented themselves, John Drag-

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lea and Bertha of Clotheram, and so they two now be man and wife and none may put them asunder."

For a moment there was dead silence. Jock sat with his arms defiantly folded, striving to catch young Richard's eye. Bertha stood with head bent; but the two elder men, now convinced, could at first find no vent for their anger.

The Canon was the first to loose his tongue against Jock, standing in the doorway, his finger outstretched, his stalwart form shaking with rage.

"That ever I should have bred this viper to sting my hand, to be my undoing and my shame. Sir Ninian, count him not of my blood. I cast him off. He is none of mine. May——"

"Stay!" cried Jock, staggering to his feet. "Curse me not, Sir Christopher; spare me that at least."

And suddenly the Canon stopped, opened his mouth again, and then struggling with himself, he turned his face to the door and said, in a low voice, "I had almost done so."

But Sir Ninian had turned to ice.

"There will be no need for a curse, Sir Christopher. Should this nephew of thine dare to show his face in Rippon he will have me to do with, and as for this shameless hussy, why, I'll—I'll——"

"Yes, Sir Ninian, what will you do?" said

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Bertha coolly and contemptuously, looking straight in his eyes. "What can you do? I am Bertha, Lady of the Manor of Clotheram, in possession of which I am now, being passed out of pupillage. What concern is it of yours whom I marry, so long as I pay your fine, and if I have chosen Jock Draglea to mate with, a man who has fought for and won me with his hands, what is it to you, or to your son Richard, who could not win or hold me?"

Then Sir Ninian tried to stutter out a reply, but could find none but "Impudent hussy; ungrateful, graceless girl." And lastly, in a passion, strode out of the hermitage, and he and Sir Christopher, both in disorder, rode away. But Richard Markenfield found an opportunity to whisper to Jock: "Wait till to-morrow mid-day, and I will send thee a horse and money, and I will remember this service of thine as long as I live," and then hastened away after the other two.

As Sir Ninian and the Canon rode singly along the woodland path, the knight in front was choking with rage, and threw some words over his shoulder to the Canon behind.

"God's curse on your nephew, Kit. A base, treacherous knave!"

"Hold, Sir Ninian," replied Sir Christopher. "He is at least my flesh and blood."

But the knight in his passion threw caution and regard for his old friend to the winds. "Flesh and

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blood? If he come within sight of Markenfield, or even of Rippon, it shall be seen what his flesh and blood is made of. The rogue shall suffer for it."

But the Canon's own temper had been sorely tried, and he was not in his nature a patient man.

"Look you, Sir Ninian Markenfield," he said in a quietly dangerous tone, "that he, my nephew, has grievously wronged both you and me is not to be denied. Yet no one but myself shall take in hand his correction."

"I say he shall have correction as I will," cried Sir Ninian, his voice rising higher. "I will send men now from Hutton, when we come there, to hale him, wound or no wound, to Markenfield, and there we will see if I am to be thwarted and bearded by you or your nephew, Kit Draglea."

The pathway broadened here into a little dell, and the Canon drew level, as he laid his hand on the sword that had done good work at Hood.

"You had not dared to speak thus to me, were I not a man of peace, but you have overshot the mark. No man shall mock Kit Draglea, because he now wears a priest's frock. We will see, Ninian Markenfield, who is the better man, and whether my joints have grown as rusty as you seem to think."

The knight at first was taken aback, and looked

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amazed that his ill-temper had been taken thus, but the Canon, who was pale with anger, cast a jeer at his seeming reluctance, which brought angry blood again into the old knight's face, and both drawing their swords at once, they fell to on one another in the little dell, their heavy claymores striking fire out of their helmets and shoulder-pieces.

But Richard, ending his talk with Jock, came riding after them and into the little dell where the fight had hardly begun. So blinded with passion were the two old friends, that Richard Markenfield could not come between them before the Canon got in a heavy blow on the knight's helmet, which made him reel in his saddle. Seizing that moment, Richard thrust his horse between, and called on both to stop. The sight of his old friend reeling had greater effect on the Canon, whose heart was stung with remorse and fear that he had done him an injury. Richard himself reached over to hold his father upright, and the Canon, hurling his sword to earth, threw an arm round him from the other side.

Sir Ninian with difficulty pulled himself straight in the saddle and panted in a feeble voice, "A good blow, Kit. No rust in your joints."

Penitent tears rained down the Canon's face.

"Curses on my temper, Ninian. Are you hurt?"

"As sound as ever. Only my brain shaken with

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that stroke and the fatigue of the last few days in Hambletons. I doubt I am getting too old for rough campaigning, old friend."

Richard, seeing his father recovered and all ill-temper gone, wisely drew ahead, leaving the two older men to follow together.

When the knight and the Canon had gone, Drag-lea sat with eyes cast upon the ground, and after a little, raising them, he found Bertha gazing earnestly at him.

"Why did you deny that Mallory and the Monk were the same?" she asked. "He was your enemy."

"I have fought with him twice," replied Jock. "No one would betray an enemy with whom he had once striven to the end."

Bertha gave a low laugh.

"A man's reason! But now, what will you do?"

Jock thought a moment.

"When the horse comes, which Dick promised, I shall ride to Hull."

"And what is to become of me?"

"You must ride with me."

"What to do?"

"To present the two parts of that indenture to the merchant of Hull and to receive the dowry for them."

"What if I refuse to go?"

"Then will I carry you by force. A man may

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force his wife in the way of duty and no one may interfere."

"Never wilt thou force me," she cried. "I will indeed flout thee and mock thee no more, for how can a maid scorn him who, in three fights, has in one day overcome his foe? But hate thee I can, and still will, until I be released by death, thine or mine, or until the Church unties the knot that has villainously bound thee and me together." And with that she bounced out of the room.

But when the next day came, and with it the horse sent by Richard and a purse of money from Sir Christopher—who had so far relented but sent a message that Jock should keep away from Rippon—then, when Jock called to Bertha to mount behind him, suddenly she obeyed, and was lifted on to the pillion by the priest; and from behind she muttered in Jock's ear: "It suits me to go with you to Hull to escape from this hateful spot, but imagine not that I will play the submissive wife when we come there and when my fortune is handed to me."

"What belongs to a wife belongs to her man," said Jock. "The twenty thousand crowns will be mine when I show the indenture and this writing from the priest that Bertha of Clotheram and John Draglea have been duly joined together."

Then in her rage she took him by the shoulders and shook him with all her might, and then dealt him stinging blows upon his ears from behind.

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And Jock only laughed under her hand, but they were shrewd blows, as he was yet weak from his recently-healed wound, and they shook his breath, but she from behind could not see the pallor of his face.

After that, in three days' slow riding, they came to Hull.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT FURTHER HAPPENED IN HULL

"OUT of mere love for you, Richard of Markenfield, am I caught in a thorny thicket of trouble. A man may more lightly give his life for his friend than wed his maid.

"Alack, Dick! I am heavy in spirit for what I have done. It seemed a little matter to cozen and wed a wild wench, if thereby I might please you and not displease Sir Ninian. To his sire shall go the dowry, said I, and to Dick a riddance of the bar to his Margaret. And now 'tis done, what is it but a knavish trick and a fond to boot? For when a man comes to it, the shackles of marriage be neither light to bear nor easy to shift. Here be I, yoked to a strange and changeable creature. What saith Vergilius Maro? *Varium et mutabile*. Now a spitting, clawing cat; in a little while playing on your heart-strings with her melting words and siren airs. Heaven save simple men from such bewilderments. Here be I, an avoider of women pests, now myself enmeshed in the toils of one.

"But to the tale which I promised that you should have when we parted at Hood.

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"We started for Hull. The happenings of the going there, with its bickerings and railings, were idle to tell—and no space here. The Saints forbend the like from friends of mine. Lord! these women! And yet, but for the fiery spirit that Ralph bequeathed to her, the maid, let me tell you, is none so ill when she falls silent and casts down her lash-fringed eyes—which, alack, is seldom—and then again flashes a look upwards in a certain way.

"One matter only shall be told of our three days' ride. At Easingwold they teased a woman on the green set in a chair in an iron collar, a gag in her mouth. 'Twas as good as a sermon for my shrew, and ease of heart to a man weary with words, and mostly ill words. So we came to Hull in the morning, after lying at Beverley that night, a sore journey, a man and a maid on one horse and scant love between.

"Lo, at our very coming in at Whitefriars gate a careless eye might well have lost us old Clotheram's gold. A drunken shipman cracked cobnuts in the gateway and threw the shells with a loutish laugh at folk going by. He wore a red seaman's cap hanging on one side. But the scar athwart his nose and cheek I had last seen under a sallet amongst Sir Andrew's men at Hood. When his eye lighted on me, he hiccoughed loudly, and fell on his face in the mire, but not before I had suspicioned him for a spy.

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"After we had ridden past I heard him roaring out a sea chanty as he staggered along the street behind us.

"Forewarned thus I told Madam what the drunkard was; that there was need of a ready wit and quick action to forestall Sir Andrew; that the gold must be removed before he could gather his forces. She had no more liking than I that it should fall into his hands and perhaps come to Sir Wilfred whom she now abhorred.

"No sooner, therefore, had the nag been stabled in a decent inn looking upon the Market Place, whilst my lady removed the dust and disorder of the journey, than we set out after inquiry privily made of the Innkeeper.

"Ay, said he, there was a back way out from his inn through a little garth into the High Street. Not many doors down was the sign of the Golden Fleece, where lived Master Fordyce, the Goldsmith. And so we passed out at the back unseen by the drunken shipman, whom we heard still lustily singing at the entrance to the courtyard of the inn. To the end of the High Street, where lived Master Fordyce, was no great distance, and in a few moments we were come to his door. By good hap he was within, and I had soon set forth my business and shown him the parchments.

"He was a withered up old rascal, and peered at the maiden with a sour smile.

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"For aught I know the parchments may have been stolen," he said to me.

"But is not the lady known to you?" I asked.

"He looked closely at her again and said, 'Ay; she is Cotheram's daughter right enough. I saw her but two years since, a pert, overgrown slip of a wench, with a tongue. Ay, I remember her tongue!' And then he began to cackle and to shake with laughter.

"No doubt the lady will speak again," I said slyly, 'that you may identify the sound of her tongue.'

"Lord, no!" he said hastily. 'I am satisfied. My bond is good and has never been broken. The old pirate knew that, when he chose me for this business: risky, but he paid well. Yes, here is my moiety of the indenture: it accords with yours. And this is the marriage writing? And the lady herself, no doubt of that. And she owns you, John Draglea—that is the name I see—for her wedded husband. Yes, all is in order—and you married her Faith! You are a gallant man, Master John Draglea, and I wish you joy of your bride!'

"He began to cackle again, but caught a look from the Lady Bertha which cut him short. At that he seemed to shrivel up still smaller, and saying hurriedly he would go fetch the gold and treasure, he shuffled out of the room. Soon he was back with

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a serving man carrying a heavy bag, and himself a lighter one.

"Out of this he poured on the table a heap of glittering jewels and thrust a paper into my hand.

"Great pearls from the Gulf of Paria and rubies from the Turks; I have appraised them all, and the value of the little bag is many times that of the gold, £500 though it be. Here is the schedule. Check them off if you will.'

"Nay,' said I, sweeping them back into the bag and thrusting it into the bosom of my doublet, 'I understand not gems, and will take your honesty for granted, Master Fordyce.'

"My trust pleased the old man and he put the discharge before me to sign.

"One confidence begets another, Master Drag-lea. There came yesterday one who called himself a messenger from Clotheram to ask if you had come here. But a countryman hath not tarry hands. You will do well to be wary, young sir. Old Ralph's gang were dangerous men to know.'

"I thanked him for his warning and, leaving his door, walked in the middle of the kennel with my sword bared in my hand, the gold bag under my arm and the other tucked away in my doublet, whilst my lady walked on my left, and so we passed down the street to the back way of the inn.

"But fortune was with me that day. Before we

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came to the turning, a man in a richly furred gown stepped out of a doorway in front of us and, looking hard at me as he passed, halted and said: 'What, Master Draglea, are you in Hull on the Canon's business?'

"Then I knew him for a merchant of the Staple and an Adventurer too, one Sir Roger Staper, who lay one night at the Prebend House, with whom Sir Christopher had entrusted moneys at venture.

"And seeing Sir Roger was eyeing my naked blade askance and looking curiously at my lady, a sudden thought came to me.

"'Nay, Sir Roger,' said I, 'I was even now coming to your house on this lady's business, to bestow with you her property for which she would fain have safer keeping than she has yet found.'

"'Then come within at once,' he replied hastily, turning back with us and leading the way to his own door. 'This is no place to display money bags,' with a look at that under my arm. 'Strange things have happened in this port of late, and there be dangerous folk about.'

"Whilst he fitted the key to the lock, Lady Bertha drew me aside.

"'The money and jewels were to go to the inn,' she said angrily.

"'Nay,' I replied in an undertone, 'this is a better course. They will be safer here.'

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"'I would have them at the inn,' she repeated obstinately.

"'And I,' said I, 'would have them here,' and followed Sir Roger, who had by now opened the door. She had but time to breathe out 'Thief' behind me, as Sir Roger ushered us into a room lined with strong boxes and a square oak table in the midst. On this I hastened to place the two bags, and said, for my lady to hear as well as the merchant :

"'These two bags, Sir Roger Staper, hold property belonging to Lady Bertha here, of the Manor of Clotheram, near Rippon. It is my will and hers'—here I looked sternly at her—'that you should hold these at her sole disposal to be drawn upon at her will and in such way as you and she together shall choose, and this being the lady's business and not mine, I will leave you now to settle these matters with her. And so good day to you, Sir Roger.'

"With that I shook him by the hand, and before my lady could say aught, I was outside in the street.

"And now the murder's out, Dick Markenfield, and you must know that I have fooled you and Sir Ninian with only half the service I promised done.

"It had come upon me all at once in the glade at Hood that the maid had none to take her part, with cheats and ravishers on either side, and how 'twas a scurvy deed to wed her by a trick and a scurvier to cozen her out of old Clotheram's gold; and so I

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had come to Hull resolved at least to put that in her hands to do with it what she would.

"When I returned to the inn, I heard of a merchant in cloth going to Rippon by York, who would start early the next morning. Therefore I am sitting in the gloom of this inn with cramped fingers when I would liefer be in the sunlight that dances on the waters of the harbour. I had heavy on my heart the disappointment of Sir Ninian. I thought to buy my peace with him by the Clotheram dowry. But it may not be. A man must needs follow right and be merciful to helpless maidens, though they be shrews. The knight will say I am but a self-seeker and a hypocrite; for am I not wedded to her and her gold? Yet even here there may be ways. But enough for the present. Without further excuse I will make an end. There shall be more from me as occasion serves.

"Given at the Muscovy Inn on the eve of St. Lawrence,

"JOHN DRAGLEA."

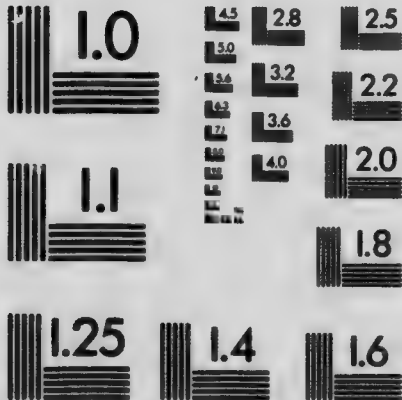
But the occasion never served for a second letter from Jock to Richard, by reason of the many things which happened suddenly to the former soon afterwards. Therefore, what afterwards happened must be told here.

When Bertha came out from Sir Roger Staper's house and joined Jock, who had been pacing



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the street, she was gentler than he had yet seen her.

"So the plunder is not to go to Sir Ninian?"

"A man may change his mind," said he.

She looked at him in some wonder and replied in a softer tone, "And so may a woman."

And he pondering what she meant, they went in silence until they reached the inn, where they were served with supper in a private room.

She had been quiet and full of thought since they left the merchant's house, and Jock was the first to speak, as the serving man put a dish of mutton before them. He slowly carved a portion for her and then said :

"What is your will, now that our purpose in coming here is served?"

She flashed a look at him, and then dropped her eyes to the table, saying :

"To return without delay to Clotheram."

He nodded. "That shall be as soon as may be, but we must wait some days in Hull."

"And why?"

"Because the nag is foundered with its double burden, and will not be recovered from its lameness for three or four days."

"Is there but one horse in Hull?"

Jock replied gravely : "I have no money. To buy another will take from your gold. But it shall be so, an you will."

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"An you will, quotha. Here's a change," said she with a toss of the head and a curling lip. "Marry! 'twas 'Come you must,' 'Do this and do that,' like a tyrant, but a day gone. But now, 'An you will' and 'What would you?' 'Tis a late repentance," said she, rousing from her weariness to something of her old spirit.

Jock looked her straight in the eyes as she raised them defiantly, and he gazed at her in a way that made the colour sweep over her face, until she lowered her eyes in some confusion, and he drew in his breath.

"You need a master, mistress, and I am thinking I could play the part to you. But the knot that binds us together was tied in an ill fashion, which I would unloose if I could. I have given you back your gold, and I would give you your freedom if I could find a way. If I am more gentle now I know myself in the wrong. Therefore, say what you will; but be assured I will get you to Clotheram as soon as I may, and if the Canon can make interest with the Cardinal, and the Lord Cardinal can get the ear in our business of the Holy Father in Rome, who knows but you may be rid of me?"

The colour in the girl's face grew to a burning red, and then faded out and left her pale with an angry light in her eyes.

"By my faith, a gallant gentleman are you, first by treachery to steal a wife, and then to scorn her."

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Jock looked at her in wonder.

"Nay, that were last in my thoughts, to scorn you. Is it not your will to have this wrong righted?"

She struck the table with her hand, making the dishes ring out.

"A truce to such talk. My will is to be at Clotheram; after that to see you no more."

Jock, looking at her in amazement, shook his head.

"I had thought to please you. A woman's ways are past finding out," he said ruefully. "But since to be at Clotheram is the matter of most import, there is a way of getting there softer than the saddle. What say you to going by water? There be hoys and barges plying through York to Boroughbridge, I'm told, starting from the quayside most days."

"By water be it," said she, abating her tone. "Word may be sent to John Carter, my steward, to meet us at Boroughbridge with horses."

Jock laughed in relief.

"At last we have found something on which we are agreed, Mistress Bertha."

Thereat her frowning brow relaxed, and she looked on him with more gentleness, he thought, so that he found himself wishing she could be more often like that, for when she smiled she was very fair to look upon.

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Before the meal was ended her head was drooping over the table and her eyelids heavy with much weariness, so that soon she said she must sleep at once, since she had had little of late; and so went up the stairs to her room on the higher balcony.

Jock was too full of disturbing thoughts and new emotions to court sleep while daylight lasted. It was some two hours to sunset and more to dark, and he wandered out to the waterside. Inland bred, he was drawn by the novelty of the seaway and the manners of shipmen, the salt, free air, and the level, far-reaching expanse of the Humber.

At the south end of the town, where it overlooked the Humber on the one side and the deep channel called the Dolphin, by which the river Hull is entered, on the other, he found a short slope of ragged grass and sand above high-water mark, and here he threw himself down on his face and gazed out over the water curling under a fresh breeze from the east.

Out in the estuary, near the entrance to the Dolphin, a fine ship swung at anchor. He watched a wherry containing a single rower reach its side: several figures climbed down into the boat, which was then rowed swiftly away into the harbour, there passing out of sight.

Then his mind wandered from the scene before him to all that had happened since he left Hood. He had jested and jested again in his letter to Richard

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of the bickerings of that ride, but, in fact, the close intimacy of it had played havoc with his resolves; and all at once, as he lay there questioning what he meant to do, he became aware that he had fallen in love with the maid that was his wife and yet no wife. A curse between his teeth at the thought faded into a sigh over her beauty, as his eyes rested on the red flush of the setting sun upon the waters. Next, the shame of it made him hot, if his new humility should be met with scorn.

So mood followed mood, and lost in his thoughts to outward sights and sounds he had looked with unseeing eyes over the restless waves. Meanwhile behind him figures of men were stealing up, who otherwise had not found him so easy a prey. A scuffle of hurrying feet across the stretch of dry sand in a final rush upon him was the only warning which fell, little heeded, upon his ears till he found his face thrust hard into the sand, a weight upon his shoulders, and one arm jerked back within a hempen noose. The skill of his wrestling bouts came to his aid. Before his captors could secure his legs he had drawn one knee up beneath him, and with that as lever and arched, straining back, he threw them off and gained a more upright position on his knees. Then, leaping to his feet, he had time to deal a crushing blow with his fist, which sent one to earth senseless, but, his left arm being still entangled in the noose, two men, putting all their weight on to it,

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plucked him back with a jerk, so that he spun round and dropped upon his face again. This time they made sure by falling all upon him at once, and each securing an arm or a leg, they hung on with all their might until a fifth had trussed him up with a c

Then they turned him over, and Jack saw bending over him the face of the scarred spy. "We intend you no harm, master," said he, "but you must come with us to the brigantine yonder. This is by order of Sir Andrew, whom you know."

For reply Jock, with curses, strove to shake himself free of his bonds, but the rope was stout and held him firm. He felt himself lifted and carried to the waterside a little way off, where a boat was waiting. Some loiterers hard by looked on curiously, but made no response to his cries for help. And so he was laid in the bottom of the boat and quickly rowed to the ship, bawling for help and cursing his captors.

Once aboard the ship, where a crowd of fierce-looking shipmen were gathered, all hope of rescue was gone, and Jock ceased his struggles.

From above came a great bellowing voice :

"Cast off the lashings from his feet, ye lubbers, and be quick about it."

And looking up, Jock saw Sir Andrew's red, hairy face hanging over from the quarter-deck, where he leaned with both hands on the rail at the break of the poop.

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"This is an ill way of bringing a friend aboard, Master Draglea, but it was for want of a better; and if my rascals have inconvenienced you more than they need, by Our Lady they shall answer to me for it." And he looked fiercely upon them.

"By God, Sir Andrew," cried Jock, his voice thick with passion, "if I can come at you with my bare hands, I shall be content, since this is your doing, it seems."

"Oh, ay," laughed the giant, "go easy, lad. We will talk together, but in better fashion than that, I warrant, when you hear what I have to say and for what I have had you brought aboard. Show him into our best cabin, bullies, and I will soon be with you, Master Draglea."

Then they took him up through a narrow gangway, with doors on either side, and to a roomy cabin facing them which filled the whole of the after part of the ship and had lights looking out from the stern. Here they left him, but with his hands still bound behind him, though by Sir Andrew's orders his legs were now free.

And soon Sir Andrew came in with a jest and a laugh and strode up to the table. "Tut, tut," he said, "they have left thee bound." And drew a dagger from his belt.

Jock strained furiously at the cords round his wrist, but Sir Andrew, stepping behind him, with one slash

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cut through them and, fronting him, handed the dagger to him by its point.

"If you want to cut my weasand, lad," he said in a whimsical tone, "get it done, and then we will talk."

Jock threw down the dagger and sank sullenly into a chair.

"What have you to say?" he muttered.

Sir Andrew, taking a seat opposite, placed his elbows on the table, framing his broad face in his hands.

"I say we have brought you here for your profit as well as ours."

"I owe you a thousand pardons, Sir Andrew," said Jock with bitter irony. "I was foolish enough to think you were after the Lady Bertha's gold."

"That, too," replied the knight with candour, "is in a manner true."

"I knew it," said Jock with a sneer; "and wherein lies the profit of that to me?"

"Profit and honour, too," nodded Sir Andrew emphatically.

"These be riddles," replied Jock, "and I was ever dull at finding the answer to one."

"In plain terms, lad, we want the gold to fit out an expedition which will bring all of us, as I say, profit and glory; and we are ready to offer you a share in it."

"I am overcome with your exceeding goodness, Sir Andrew. You will take the gold, willy-nilly,

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and perhaps some day I may get a portion back with something that you name honour and I might have to call shame. O kind Sir Andrew! But you shall not take my gold, for the gold is not my gold, but my wife's, and that is my answer to you, my loving benefactor."

"What a fierce young game-cock you are!" laughed the knight good-humouredly. "Now, what's your wife's is yours."

It was on the tip of Jock's tongue to say that the treasure was no longer in his possession. That would have ended the matter, and Sir Andrew might have seen no cause to detain him longer on the ship. But he was cautious by instinct, and, besides, was curious to hear what the Scotch knight would offer.

"Now look you," continued the latter, "Mallory and I have a sort of claim to this gold."

"How may that be?" said Jock with contempt, but secretly glad that he would now hear more.

"It is a long story," said Sir Andrew. "You have heard of Sir Anthony Mallory, Sir Wilfred's father?"

Jock nodded. "A younger brother of Sir William, the lord of Studley Manor. He died on the high seas, I have heard, and was lucky to have escaped the gallows on the foreshore."

"Now he," continued Sir Andrew, passing by Jock's comment, "and old Ralph Clotheram and

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another—whom I need not yet mention—were comrades and partners in some sea ventures."

"My uncle, Sir Christopher, used to say Sir Anthony was a sea robber, like many others, until King Harry cleared the narrow seas of them."

"Well, well, King Harry's father drove men hard, and some perforce had to take to the sea to get them a living by pillaging the king's enemies; and farther south there was the Turk; that was godly work. No doubt they made mistakes at times, and a man must live. However that may be, here were these three who, out of many a hard fight, amassed a goodly treasure, and while things went well they made a compact to share and share alike, and that the survivors should be heirs to the dead, if one or the other fell. But when King Harry the Eighth began, as you say, to sweep the seas with his new navy, Clotheram lost his ship once and again, and the others had to make good his losses. Next, this same Clotheram, under much obligation to his partners, turned traitor, or deserter, which you will. Without a word he left his comrades and took service first with the Portugals and later with the Spaniards. News came to us but a short time since that he had returned with rubies and pearls of great price to Hull, and going home had died of a calenture, bequeathing his gains to his daughter and not to his partners, as was right."

Here Sir Andrew looked shrewdly at Jock.

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"Perhaps, Master Draglea, you may have seen these same pearls and rubies?"

But Jock cunningly evaded the question.

"His daughter's account agrees not with yours. She says the partnership was dissolved with consent of all."

Sir Andrew laughed contemptuously.

"So that is old Ralph's tale. But to complete mine. Now, some years earlier Anthony Mallory was killed in fight with the Turk on the Barbary coast, and only one of the old company was left."

"And that one, no doubt, was yourself," interrupted Jock.

"Belike it may have been. I will not say nay to it, nor yet yea," replied Sir Andrew with the caution of a Scotsman. "But soon there were two again. For one day, as we lay moored by Antwerp quay, there came over the gangway one who said he was Anthony Mallory's son. He had come to seek his father's old comrade, he said, to join him in a mad scheme that he had conceived. And yet," said Sir Andrew, his brows contracting and his merry face becoming for the moment more serious, "and yet it may be not so mad," and was silent for awhile.

"However that may be," he continued, breaking off his thoughts, "however that may be, he had a tongue, and before he had finished he had half persuaded me. Anyway, for this scheme money is

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needed, and money we have since been trying to collect by what means we could."

Suddenly Jock's mind was enlightened.

"Ha, now I see Sir Wilfred's hand in matters that have puzzled the folk of Rippon. And—yes, of course—the captive at Hood with the party who came from Byland."

"Call him not a captive," laughed Sir Andrew, "only a guest, a great churchman, who to contribute out of his abundance to our venture, which, let me tell you," and again his face became serious, "is one which Holy Church would most approve. In short, Master Draglea, you now see for what purpose we need those jewels to which, as I have also shown, we have some claim, I and Sir Wilfred, who is heir to his father's rights."

"And what warrant have I for all this, Sir Andrew?"

The other's blue eyes lit up fiercely, and he clapped his hand to his hilt.

"Do you doubt my word?"

Jock looked him quietly in the face for a moment and then said: "It is not because I am unarmed and in your power that I say I do believe you, and beg your pardon, Sir Andrew, for doubting you."

The other, with a great oath seized Jock's hand and crushed it in his own huge paw.

"Lad, you are one after my own heart. We want

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something more than your wife's pearls; we want you for a comrade in this venture of Sir Wilfred's."

"But you have not told me what it is."

Sir Andrew's mouth fell open. "Beshrew me for a doddypole, I have not, like a gaby, and may not, for Sir Wilfred must be party to that; and, therefore, since no more may be said between us, and ship matters call for my presence, I must leave you, Master Draglea, to think upon what I have said. Rap on the door there, and they shall bring you food and wine or anything else that you may want." And so he went out, but Jock heard him shoot the bolt on other side.

As soon as he had gone Jock looked closely to all sides of the cabin for some way of escape. First he tried the stern windows. The waning light that still glittered on the water showed a little boat fastened by a rope just below on the Hull side of the ship. At sight of it hope rose and fell as quickly when he saw how stoutly timbered the small windows were, and turning to the central door found it of thick oak, barred on the outside, which yielded not an inch to the hardest thrust of his shoulder. On the left was a smaller door, but a trial of the bolt showed it had another fastening on the other side. Seeing for the present no way of escape, he threw himself on the settle under the stern lights to think out some plan of action; but at once the sound of someone moving on the far side of the door which he had just shaken

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made him rise at once and fix his eyes upon it. There was the sound of a bolt withdrawn, and the door opened slowly and cautiously. A shaven head was thrust through it, followed by a tall, portly form, and a pair of glittering eyes fixed themselves on Jock. The stranger glided into the cabin and shut the door noiselessly behind him, holding up one hand in caution to Jock.

Jock, with a look of astonishment, bowed low before the stranger.

"The Lord Abbot of Byland!"

"Ha! You know me. And you? Surely I have seen you somewhere?"

"I am nephew to the Canon of Monkton at Rippon."

"I remember, I remember. You were of the Canon's household when last I came to Rippon, to St. Wilfrid's Feast! And how came you here? Are you a captive too, or—one of my captors?"

"God forbid, Father Abbot. But was it you they brought to Hood?"

The Abbot of Byland nodded with suspicion still in his eye.

"What know you of Hood, that nest of thieves?"

The Abbot did not, however, wait for a reply, but seemed to be listening to the sounds that came from other parts of the ship.

"Hist," he continued, "we must be brief. The nephew of Sir Christopher, who fought at Flodden,

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should be a stout man and a true, and I have need of such."

Jock raised his head. "I swear, Father Abbot, you shall not find me wanting in service. In this matter count me on your side, whoever may be on the other. I, like you, have been kidnapped."

"You too? Then listen. At any moment we may be interrupted. A few minutes since he whom they call Sir Andrew told me to prepare to be transferred to a ship lying near. That will carry me up this river, he said, to some safe hiding-place in Scotland, until my ransom is paid, for which a messenger is even now negotiating at Byland. But they shall be cheated of their hopes with your aid, my son. When they take me away, it is likely they will leave the outer door unfastened, believing this through which I came still locked; or, at least, I will contrive that it shall be so. Then must you escape out of the ship and, going ashore, raise the hue and cry against these thieves in the port of Leith."

"Leith?" cried Jock. "But we are off the city of Hull."

The Abbot looked startled. "They told me Leith. After a rough ride across the Hambletons we descended to a little port, where I was brought aboard this vessel and have been since confined below. Ten days we have been at sea beating about, and then they told me we were off the port of Leith."

But just then the clatter of steps on the ladder

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broke off the Abbot's words, and, whispering "Remember," he glided swiftly into his own cabin, gently closing the door behind him.

Clearly he had retreated only just in time, for the footsteps came not to the end of the passage, but stopped at the door of the Abbot's cabin and there entered. After much talking, in which Jock could distinguish both Sir Andrew's and the Abbot's voices, the outer door banged, and the sound of retreating footsteps was soon followed by stillness in that part of the ship.

After waiting for some minutes to be sure they were not returning, Jock again tried the door of the Abbot's cabin, and finding it still unfastened seized the chance of escape, for the farther door, too, yielded to his hand. Passing quickly along, he looked cautiously out into the waist of the ship.

Here in the gathering gloom men could be seen lowering themselves into a boat lying alongside.

He ran back to the stern cabin, where from the window he could better watch without himself being seen. The boat was now pulling off in the direction a barge anchored nearer to the Lincolnshire shore. There was light enough for him to follow its progress, and to see them reach its side and clamber on board. Then, fearing his own opportunity might pass, he returned again to the deck, resolved to risk any chance of being seen.

But if anyone besides himself was left in the ship

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none was visible, and looking over the side nearest to Hull, he was rejoiced to find the smaller boat there still tied up by the stern gallery.

Now, as you will remember, the ship was anchored with her head up stream, and at that time the ebb had begun to flow. From the stern gallery Jock had to pull the boat up by its rope and then drop into it as best he might, almost upsetting it as he stumbled over the thwarts. As soon as he had cut away with his dagger, the wherry drifted at a great rate down stream on the fast ebb. At once the ship became but a dim shape in a rapidly darkening, cloudy night. Though Jock at once put out the oars and rowed steadily towards Hull, where lights began to be visible in the windows of the houses on the front, he found himself, despite his efforts, fast dropping down below it, so strong was the current.

Fearing that at this rate he might soon be carried out into the open sea, he turned the boat straight for the shore with vigorous strokes. The little craft danced up and down at first in the tumultuous flood, but soon passed into the quieter waters, where his efforts told more in driving her to land.

But whereas he had hoped soon to reach the shore, a gentle, sliding swish beneath her keel brought him to a stand, and looking over his shoulder he found himself aground on an oozy bed of mud. A light matter, he thought, as he stood up with one ear to thrust her off again into deep water; but the very

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vigour of his last few strokes was his undoing. The ebb was fast uncovering the river bottom. Between him and the water were now some boat-lengths of shiny mud, and so fast increasing—faster than he could move—that after a brief attempt he gave up and saw that he must pass the night there, until such time as the tide returned and floated him off again. And so he stretched his length, as far as he might, along the bottom, resting his head on a coil of rope; and staring up into the clouds that raced across the sky, so fell asleep. And as he slept there came to him a vision of passion-filled eyes and red lips that whispered softly, "And so may a woman."

The sun with her warm rays and the lapping of wavelets against the side of the boat awoke him. Looking out, he found himself adrift and moving with the flood back to the city, which he had vainly striven to reach the night before. Soon passing the anchorage of Sir Andrew's ship, he found her vanished, but far ahead up river he noted a sail with the device which the barge had had. After that it was an easy matter for him to enter the Dolphin passage and so to come into the very harbour of Hull.

Now from the time he awoke, one thought only had filled his mind. The power of his dream was still great, and as he thought on it, a great light of understanding broke upon his mind. Bending with all his might to the oars, he whispered joyfully in

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time to his stroke, "And so may a woman—a woman may do so too."

And so, mooring his boat, he came in great haste to the inn, the lingering passion of his dream and rising hopes winging his feet, and there he asked of the first he met if the Lady Bertha was risen and had come down to the common room. And the man looked him in the face and said :

"Ay, the lady be risen and has gone forth with those who rode in early to fetch her."

Jock looked blankly upon him.

"She has ridden forth? And whither?"

"The strangers said they were from the Manor of Clotheram, and they brought a led horse for the lady. Some half-hour since they set forth, going first to the house of Master Staper on the river front."

Bitterness followed hard upon bewilderment in Draglea's heart. The vision of his dream had been but a mischievous Jack o' Lanthorn, to end in a swamp of disappointment. He turned on his heel with a brief nod of dismissal to the servant, and came face to face with one who held out a letter to him.

He tore it open, hoping it might be from Bertha, and found a brief word from Sir Roger Staper.

"Mistress Bertha came to me here this morning before returning to Clotheram. She left word that she was starting for Clotheram, and that a hundred guineas were to be paid Master Draglea at the Inn."

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Jock, with an oath, tore the paper across and said to the messenger :

"Hark ye. Take this message to Master Staper. I am beholden to him for his message, but that I want no gold." Then he strode off to the stable to ask for his horse, with maledictions on the whole race of women.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW THE DEVIL CAME TO FOUNTAINS IN THE GUISE OF A MONK

The substance of this chapter is taken, with some necessary condensation, from a manuscript written by one who seems to have been contemporary with the events recorded, and certainly shows a leaning to the Old Faith. Could he have been Edmund Brown, the Deacon, or, perhaps, the Cellarer of Fountains?

That in troublous times the Devil will be busiest, his handiwork and even his bodily presence becoming more visible and material, when his power is triumphant, no Christian man will gainsay, and least of all one who clings to the Old Faith, which began to be much questioned in the reign of King Henry and a little later was shattered almost to pieces in England.

Many in Rippon in those days, who could read the signs of the times, foresaw great evil coming upon the town and a sudden check to its abounding prosperity. Their children still speak of their fathers' perplexities and forebodings, and how they were amply justified by the ruin and decay, that have overtaken the old town and its neighbour of Fountains

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through the wilfulness of the King and the greed of his courtiers.

Those of the other opinion, the adherents of what has been called the new learning, said otherwise, that light was being brought into the dark places and fetters lifted from man's understanding, fetters grown too grievous to be borne, which churchmen had laid on others to puff up themselves rather than to glorify Christ, their Founder.

Say what these will, none can deny that the peace of old Rippon was sorely disturbed at this time; that strange things were coming to pass; and that men went in much bewilderment and fear. Signs and portents were the forerunners of the wickedness that was to follow. Small wonder that Satan should break out and become manifest in the flesh, when he saw his coming triumph in the waywardness of the monarch and his court.

And what place should the Evil One choose for one of his pranks but that inner shrine of sanctity, even the holy monastery of Fountains itself?

What the truth of the story was that was whispered first among the monks at Fountains and then getting abroad grew apace in Rippon and the neighbourhood, would pass the wits of one like myself to resolve, knowing how the little cloud of fact, no bigger than a man's hand, will presently overcast the whole sky with the unsubstantial wrack of monstrous flying mists of unwarrantable report.

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The shadow of How was creeping up to the south-west angle of the wall of the Abbey precincts, as a monk with close-drawn cowl came down the winding path from Aldfield.

A wagon passing out from the outer gate for a moment blocked his way and hid him from the gatekeeper. The wagoner, a stout grange-keeper of Sawley, carrying away his sacks of flour ground in the Abbey mill, shouted back a quip in reply to the gatekeeper's jest before the creaking wheels moved away over the Skell bridge.

When the monk stepped from behind the wagon to enter the open gate, the gatekeeper, his heavy shoulders still heaving with silent laughter, and jingling his keys from his finger, turned slowly round and peered under the monk's cowl, but saw little more there than a shadowy face and shining eyes.

"You are for the guest house, belike," he wheezed, then taking note of his frayed habit and coarse cloth of undyed wool, "and a brother of our Order?"

The monk stepped briskly through the open gate, saying:

"Ay, and would fain speak at once with the Father Abbot," and so would have gone on his way to the inner gate.

But the gatekeeper coming up to him laid his hand on his arm and said with a shake of the head:

"A brother from an abbey of our Order is ever welcome here, but, for speaking with the Lord Abbot,

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that is another matter. The hour is late and he may not be disturbed. I will summon the Guest Master to the inner gate, and he shall receive and entertain you," and he called to a horse boy standing in the archway, and bid him run ahead and tell Brother Jacobus a guest was seeking hospitality.

"But why should not Father William of Thirsk come himself and offer a prayer with me in the chapel of the gate yonder as the rule enjoins?" said the stranger. "Did not the holy Benedict say, 'Let the guest be received as though he were Christ himself'?"

The gatekeeper walking by his side smiled. "This is no little Priory, Brother. The cares that lie on the Lord Abbot's shoulders are many and great. Lesser matters he must leave to others to look to. But see, here comes Brother Jacobus, the Guest Master, to meet us. I will commend you to him and return to my gate."

The Guest Master was a man of goodly presence, smooth and courtly in manner. A smile was rarely absent from his face. With hearty heartiness he greeted the stranger monk and went forward with him over the open space. And when they had gone half-way from the inner gate towards the long range of the *domus conversorum* in front of them, the Guest Master would have drawn the stranger aside by a path to the right.

"The Guest House is this way," he explained.

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"But I am not for the Guest House," said the monk. "I go to the Abbot in his lodging."

The Guest Master looked surprised.

"The Lord Abbot, Brother, entertains guests at supper, even the Knight of Markenfield and a Canon of St. Wilfrid, and cannot receive visitors."

"He will not," replied the stranger, "refuse to receive the deputy sent by the Lord Abbot of Citeaux in his place to amend what needs amendment and to exhort the daughter House, as the custom is each year for all the Cistercian Houses."

Now it is known to all who are acquainted with the discipline of the Cistercian monks, that they in their abbeys retained longer and in greater purity than did others, the strictness and integrity of their rule through the Order made for their government by St. Bernard, which was, that each year every abbey should be inspected by the head of the Mother Abbey; and it is further known that Fountains was established by the third Abbot of Citeaux, and had therefore the honour of inspection by the first Cistercian House, the mother of them all. Now it so happened that the time of inspection had come round, and it had been reported that the Lord Abbot of Citeaux was even then on his way to make the annual visit.

Therefore it was that when the Guest Master heard the words of the stranger monk, his friendly cheerfulness changed to a great humility, as he replied :

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"From Citeaux? Then you must pardon us for the manner of your reception. No messenger came before, and we were not expecting you this evening."

The other nodded a little impatiently.

"It is well. Forward then to the Abbot's lodging," and himself led the way to a doorway in the lay brothers' house, where on the ground floor the cellarer kept stores and to the right in earlier days the Conversi had their refectory, which was now, however, given up to the servants of the Abbey; and so on to the cloister gate, where sat two of the monks, taking their weekly turn of duty as porters.

To them in high and important tones the Guest Master presented his charge, who himself added that he was Brother Hilary from Citeaux. At that name both the Guest Master and the porters looked with awe and reverence on the visitor. Hilary of Citeaux was famed throughout the houses of the Order for his austere sanctity, and was certain one day to be the head of one of the abbeys.

And so the Guest Master went softly away, wishing he had spoken in lower tones and humbler guise, and one of the porters, with the same meekness of mien, passed on with the holy brother through the cloisters.

But the sounding voice of the Guest Master had penetrated even to the door of the refectory, from which was issuing a stream of monks on their way to the Chapter House for the Collation reading. The

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foremost pricked up their ears and could not refrain from a sideways glance at Brother Hilary, and in spite of the rule of silence a whisper passed on the intelligence who he was to the ranks behind.

With his new conductor Brother Hilary went on by the passage past the parlour and beyond, where their footsteps echoed on the flagstones in the corridor that leads to the infirmary at the far end; but soon they turned off to the right up the steps to the Abbot's lodgings.

The Abbot sat at supper with his guests Sir Ninian and the Treasurer of St. Wilfrid's. They had been debating matters that closely touched all three, and the Abbot frowned with annoyance when the door was thrown open and the porter monk came tripping in.

"Brother Eugenius——!" the Abbot began severely, but was interrupted by the announcement:

"Brother Hilary from Citeaux to visit and inspect this House."

The Abbot in some agitation at once lowered his tone, and rose from his seat to meet the visitor, but looked with some perplexity on the monk, as he advanced up the room with bended head.

"You are welcome, Brother," he said, "and we are honoured by the Lord Abbot in his choice of a proctor, yet we had been led to expect our Reverend Father in God, John of Citeaux, to come in person. So he promised at the meeting of the General

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Chapter." Then turning to the serving men who stood at his chair he said: "Let a cover be laid for Brother Hilary on my right."

"Nay," said the monk, holding up his hand. "Trouble not to give me meat and drink, since I have neither hunger nor thirst, and am only weary with my journey."

"Then I will conduct you to the suite of rooms which the Lord Abbot of Citeaux always occupies over against the infirmary chapel."

Brother Hilary shook his head again in refusal.

"Provide no separate lodging for me, Brother William. I will fare and sleep as a monk of this Abbey, but if you would do special honour to the office which I unworthily fill, then let me lie in the common dormitory nearest the church and close to your cubicle, Father Abbot."

The abbot looked up in astonishment, and colouring, said stiffly, "You must be aware, Brother, that that was the fashion of old time. For more than a century the abbots have been lodged separate from the community. It is not convenient for them to lie in the common dorter. Is it not so in Citeaux itself?"

"On such matters," said the monk gravely, "we must speak again at a fitting time. As for me, to-night I at least will not lie more softly than your sons in God, the monks of this House. But so far you have taken my mission on trust and asked for

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no credentials. Here, therefore, is a letter from the Reverend Father and Master of Citeaux naming Hilary the Prior of the said House his deputy in the inspection of this Abbey and laying down certain conditions for the performance of my mission."

The Abbot read through the parchment now handed to him with the seal of Citeaux affixed, and a frown gathered again on his brow as he read. Coming to the end he lifted his eyes and let them rest with some wonderment on the monk standing meekly before him.

"Here are set forth strange commands for the ordering and the manner of your sojourn in this Abbey. You are to be permitted, it is written, 'to live the life of one of its brotherhood the three days of your stay: to have no privilege, no liberty, and no more notice taken of your goings and comings than those of the least of the brothers. But on the third day you will at the Chapter Meeting set forth what counsel you may for our edification.' This seems but poor entertainment for one so famous for sanctity and so high in the confidence of your Lord Abbot, as is here further set forth. I would have it otherwise. Yet it shall be as you and the Abbot ordain. Let me at least be your guide to the dorter."

But the monk would not. He would find his way alone he said, and having humbly received the Abbot's blessing, passed on and descended the staircase.

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The Abbot went back to his place by his guests with a black cloud on his troubled brow.

"It behoves us religious, Sir Christopher," he said, "to walk warily in these days. Even so our feet shall not escape the snare. There be our enemies without, who envy us our power and domains, and within—divisions. This Prior of Citeaux hints at the renewal of the ancient strictness of our rule, but to what end? No reformation, no austerities shall stay the hand of our plunderers. Abbot Huby is well in his grave. With him has passed the glory and security of this House." And William of Thirsk fell into a gloomy silence in which there may have been some foreboding of the gallows that awaited him.

The Canon broke into his thoughts.

"We of the Chapter of St. Wilfrid have our divisions too. Sir Christopher Joye——"

"Tool of the Mallorys," growled Sir Ninian.

"Sir Christopher Joye," repeated the Canon, "perversely named, since he would away with Christian merriment, has done all that he might to make my name stink before my Lord Cardinal."

The Abbot nodded. "I had heard of these slanders, and 'tis said that the citation of His Grace the Archbishop went astray."

"The malice of my enemies has so far miscarried," said the Canon with some hesitation, thinking of the red scrawl across the document which he had found on his desk. "By some chance it fell into the hands

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of the band of robber friars with many other documents signed and sealed by His Grace."

"My Lord Cardinal," said the Abbot ponderously, "I am told, is likely to have his hands full with the King, if he disappoints him any longer in the matter of the divorce. You may therefore rest content, Sir Christopher, that no citation will come yet awhile, or until these weightier matters be resolved."

"Ay, well enough for the Canon," grumbled the knight. "He may sleep easy o' nights, because the Cardinal is too busy with his own affairs. But for me, I had relied on Sir Christopher's interest with the Cardinal. And now he may not, nor dare not use it."

"'Twould be useless," objected the Canon impatiently, "worse than useless, as you well know, old friend. Sir Ninian," he explained to the Abbot, "would have this marriage of his ward with my graceless nephew, John Draglea, annulled at Rome."

"There is every reason for it," insisted Sir Ninian eagerly. "She was basely practised upon, knew not whom she was wedding, and so was tricked with a rite imperfectly performed."

"The facts are well known in Rippon," continued the Canon, doing his part. "Sir Ninian and I have made no secret of what happened at Hood. His plans for the aggrandisement of Markenfield through a marriage with the heiress of Clotheram have gone

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astray, and, to my sorrow, through the wilful folly of my own nephew. Those who will most rejoice at Markenfield's loss will be the Mallorys and those who hold with them. We look to you, my Lord Abbot, to check their malignant joy. Markenfield was ever staunch for the old ways, and in the evil days coming will be a strong pillar for the Old Faith."

"Markenfield and Fountains are bound together by many ancient ties," assented the Abbot.

"Then you will subscribe Sir Ninian's plea at Rome for annulment of this irregular marriage?"

The Abbot replied slowly, "What power I have with His Holiness shall be at your command, Sir Ninian, in this matter."

Sir Ninian beamed with satisfaction. "And your power we know, my Lord Abbot, is very great. This Ralph of Clotheram was a great sinner, and if the inheritance should come to Markenfield, we shall need your further advice, my Lord Abbot, what provision we should make for the good of his soul." So did the knight in plain terms hint that the Abbey would profit.

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Lauds and Matins had been sung in the dim lantern light of the Church. There the Prior of Citeaux, humbly holding aloof from the Presbytery, had taken a place among the deacons in the choir and drawn attention from all by the loud fervour of

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his devotions and the soaring sweetness of his singing.

And now they had returned from the night service into the dormitory. The Sub-Prior had made his rounds. The brethren had fallen into their soundest sleep in the hour that precedes the dawn.

But the sacristan, sleeping apart in the lobby at the top of the night stairs, became suddenly awake with an uneasy feeling that all was not well. Had he forgotten to set the alarum clock? Surely something more than that. There were unusual sounds to be heard, creaking of boards, sighs and murmurings. More likely thieves were astir with designs on the treasure room hard by. Sweating with fear at thought of danger to his special charge, the sacristan leapt from his bed, and, snatching up his lantern, went stealthily to the treasury, which lay between the dorter and the Church. But he found it safely locked and all quiet within; yet again, as he stood outside, the sound of groans and mutterings came clearly up the night stairs from the Church.

Slowly creeping to the head of the stair, he looked down into the vast spaces of the south transept, and, descending carefully to the bottom, made his way beyond with noiseless steps, until he came within view of the High Altar and a space before it dimly lighted up by a solitary lantern hanging low on a pillar near. There in the circle of the lantern light extended face downwards upon the floor at the foot

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of the great crucifix was the dark figure of one of the monks, and from him it was that the groans and sighs and exclamations came.

Then the sacristan wondered which of the brethren it was doing penance at that hour.

And presently the groaning figure rose and went to the lantern and unhooked it, and taking his stand again where he had been lying in front of the High Altar, he opened the door of the lantern and drew out the candle fixed in it: and whilst the sacristan looked, he saw the monk hold the flame of the candle between two fingers of the left hand, and then between the next two, until the smell of scorched flesh reached the sacristan; but the monk stood and uttered not a sound.

And again opening his habit and baring his breast, he passed the flame slowly from side to side, bending well over it; and yet without a cry. And lastly, taking the lantern in his right hand, he replaced it on the hook, and came back, and cast himself down again with heartrending groans. Then suddenly rising up again, he reached out his arms to the crucifix, and almost shrieked out, "Ah, me! Accursed! No sign. God takes no notice"; and after that came with unsteady steps towards the stair.

And the sacristan had barely time to go up and hide himself in the room before the self-torturer passed into the dormitory. But before that, when the light of the lantern shone on the face of the

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monk, the sacristan had seen that it was the Prior Hilary of Citeaux.

You may be sure that the sacristan did not, when morning came, keep to himself what he had seen. He mentioned it at first to the cellarer in the parlour, where they had met to go into the accounts for oil supplied to the Church, and the cellarer on a similar opportunity to the Prior; and so it went round until before the end of the day all the brotherhood were acquainted with what had happened; and when they heard how the visitor had mortified his flesh by the sharp ordeal of fire, and secretly noticed how he kept his left hand always in his sleeve, using his right hand only to his meat in the refectory, then was their reverence and admiration of the Prior of Citeaux much enhanced; and they began to bethink them of their own conduct and how it would appear in the eyes of a judge so stern to his own flesh as was this holy Hilary.

As for him, he held no conferences at all, such as were usual at the annual visit, with the Abbot and Prior, Cellarer and Sacristan; only with the utmost precision he went through all the daily duties of a Cistercian Brother, attending devoutly to every one of the seven hours of prayer, unsparing of himself in the careful observances of all the points of ceremonial, and singing with fervour in the Church.

But that night the sacristan remained awake after the night service, and going down the staircase later

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he saw all things happen as before, except that the Prior lashed his body with such severity as he could, slipping off his habit and tunic from his shoulders and down to the waist.

And the following day passed as the first and again at night the visitor was in the Church inventing new tortures for his flesh. This night his groans and sighs as he weakly climbed the stair were more grievous and hopeless, and his face as he turned it upwards was set hard and lined with great agony of spirit.

Now, on the morning of the third day when the brethren assembled in the chapter house, after the Martyrology had been read, the Prior of Citeaux did not, as on the other mornings, remain seated, silent and with bowed head, but, as he had promised the Father Abbot, arose and spoke out on the subject of his mission. And then there came a great surprise on the Abbot and the officials and all the brotherhood.

For this meek and silent monk, who had gone about in their midst, never opening his lips except in the services of the Church, attending only to the salvation of his own soul and seeming to neglect the special duty of examination of others, now began to speak in no mincing terms of the misdoings of each one present, beginning with the lowest and going on to the highest, not even shrinking from open condemnation of the Lord Abbot himself, with his tongue lashing him for his haughty spirit, for his self-seeking

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and for the many ways in which he and each of his sons in God fell short of the strict performance of the Rule of their Order.

"And because there is no open vice among you, no commission of deadly sin apparent, and ye have, as ye say in your heart, but taken up with softer living, falling away from the hardness of earlier days, indulging, too, the pride of the eye, ye think that ye do well and that ye shall escape condemnation. But I say ye shall be punished for every one of your omissions. Look to it, my Lord Abbot: look to it, the youngest and lowest of you all, for there be evil times at hand, when ye shall be searched out, and I would ye amended your ways now so as to be ready for the day of judgment."

And so saying he passed out before them all from the Chapter House through the cloisters and into the Church.

And all that day he stayed bowed down before the High Altar, and made no stir from it, when the monks came and went for the services of the day; and he had made it known in the Chapter House that he would depart at an early hour on the morrow. But after the service was ended he rose stiffly from his knees and followed the files of monks, as they passed up into the dormitory.

The sacrist had duly set his alarum clock to awaken him in time to arouse the monks for the midnight service. At its sound he took up his lantern to

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make the round of the cubicles. But hardly had he come into the midway passage when shriek after shriek echoed through the building, and at once the brothers appeared at the doors of their cubicles, casting frightened glances on one another and mutely appealing to the sacrist to know what terrible thing was happening.

But he went at once to the cubicle where the Prior of Citeaux slept, and the monks came crowding behind and peering over his shoulder into the room, where a flood of ghostly radiance from the moon fell within. And on the floor was a writhing half-naked form, twisting and untwisting in such strange contortions as made it appear less than human; and when in its rapid and violent motions the face came up into view, it was so horrible to look at, and such fearful imprecations came from its lips, that the brothers shrank away; and some fled back to their cubicles holding their heads to shut out defilement from their ears; and some cried that a devil had entered into the Holy Prior of Citeaux, and was even now struggling for possession of his anguished body.

But the sacrist had sped away to the Abbot's rooms and called him to come in haste, since none could be more powerful than he to exorcise the evil fiend out of the unlucky Prior.

And as the Abbot came running with him he said:

"This comes, my son, of that mortifying of the

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flesh, which within limits is good for the soul, but in excess may weaken a man's body that it becomes the devil's opportunity to make his entry. The Prior has been too severe in his admonitions to us on the weakness of the flesh, and now has brought his own body and soul into peril."

But when they reached the cubicle in the dormitory, hardly had the Abbot lifted up his hands and begun to utter the words "Exorciso te," than suddenly the howling creature on the floor flung his arms abroad, and, throwing his head back, became silent and still; and there he lay with his eyes glazed and turned back in a frightful, sightless gaze, while the moonlight fell strangely on his deathlike face and form.

And while the other monks held aloof, the Abbot, the sacrist, and the cellarer, with the Prior and the Sub-Prior, stood in a ring stooping over the body.

"He may be in a swoon only," said the Abbot, "therefore loose the tunic at his throat and stand back to give him all the air we can. The devil, methinks, has been driven out of him and left him half dead, even as that other one was left, whom the disciples of our Lord vainly tried to heal."

But the sacrist had greater knowledge of how the dead and dying look, and he shook his head and put a question to the Abbot in a low voice, and the Abbot said "Ay, and do it quickly."

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And the sacrist went out, and quickly returning brought a pan of ashes. Then whilst the others looked on, he spread them on the floor in two lines in the form of a cross, and the Abbot told the sacrist and the Prior to lift the seeming dead man and to lay him extended upon the cross, as is the rule for the Cistercians when about to die. But suddenly the Prior stooping over him to do the Abbot's bidding ejaculated in horror: "May the Saints preserve us. Look what is written!" And they all looked and then covered their eyes and wailing went out of the cubicle and down into the Church to pray fervently for pardon, only the Abbot and the sacrist daring to remain.

"Take the body," cried the former, "'tis your duty, brother sacrist: lay him on a bier and carry him with all speed out of this Abbey by the eastern postern. Our souls will be stained for many days by what we have looked upon. It will take much penance and prayer to wash them clean. Let him not stay a moment longer to pollute these sacred precincts, but put him out," and all the time he kept his eyes covered with his hand that he might not see the awful figure upon the ground again; and they both shuddered in horror.

Then the sacrist, much lamenting that his duty put on him so much peril, compelled the sub-sacrist to help him in carrying the bier; and they took it down the day-stairs and through the passage that

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leads to the infirmary, and, turning off to the left, through the graveyard, and across this to the gate in the wall that enclosed the Abbey on the east, where the sacrist unlocked the little door, and there outside on the banks of the Skell in the thick glades of the wood they placed the bier, and the sacrist cast a coverlet over it and the body on it.

"He has not stirred again and must be dead, yet should he still be alive, we can come and see in the morning and give him what charity we may. He must be some terrible sinner or worse, if not the Evil One himself disguised as the Holy Prior to effect our ruin."

As the monks went to Chapter the next morning, there was a stir at the cloister gate, and soon after a messenger was telling the Abbot in the parlour that he had come beforehand to announce the coming of the Abbot of Citeaux from York that day to make his annual visit.

"Then who was he who called himself Prior of Citeaux?"

The Abbot shuddered when the cellarer put that question.

"We have been in terrible and deadly peril," he replied. "Let our brother, the sacrist, see to the body, that it is burned at a distance from the Abbey in the woods by the Skell."

But when the sacrist went there in fear and trembling, he found the bier indeed but neither body

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nor coverlet, and coming back told the Abbot, who said :

"Now there can be no longer doubt that the Evil One has found his way into this Abbey. Let us thank God that he was exorcised and has now fled discomfited."

* * * * *

After passing beneath the tunnelled arches of the Abbey infirmary and beyond its eastern boundary wall, the Skell runs on by a devious channel skirting the high wooded lands on the right, until emerging at last from a wide bottom thickly set with beech and oak, it is confronted by sharply rising ground, and so plunges to the right between high limestone cliffs into a wild deep gorge, which divides the lands of Markenfield from those of Mallory.

Across is but a stone's cast, and yet the stream flows unevenly between, wildly dashing from cliff to cliff in a zigzagging course, being hurled from one to the other, like a captive darting down a double row of tormentors.

Into this gorge towards evening wandered two Churchmen, each with a rod in his hand. But though trout and chub leapt temptingly in the pools by which they passed, the cellarer of Fountains and Edmund Brown, deacon of St. Wilfrid's, gave no heed to sport. Yet both were eager fishermen and this was not their first meeting to angle in company,

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the older man and the younger, drawn together by their common pursuit.

But it was the third day since the vanishing of the false Brother Hilary. The whole Abbey was still oppressed with gloom and horror that the Arch Fiend, or one of his fellow demons, had been incarnate in their midst.

The cellarer bore his share of that heaviness of spirit. What wonder, then, he should seek to relieve his soul of some of its burden by imparting the tale to his younger friend, under promise of secrecy?

As he told it, they wandered down the stream forgetful of the art they met to practise, and so passing by fish-stirred pools, came into the gorge and opposite the towering white cliff of the Devil's Chimney, before they were aware how far they had strayed.

And the cellarer looking up at the bush-dotted heights began to wind up the rest of his line.

"The hour grows late, Master Brown, and we have come far. Mind you that what I have told you be locked up within your breast, for we of the Abbey would not have our disgrace and our danger common talk in the neighbourhood."

And the deacon gave his promise, but, his heart being full of amazement at the cunning ways of Satan, and how close he had come to holy men, he could not at once leave that subject.

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"Tell me again," said he, "what were the words that the false monk used before the High Altar."

"Just before he fled up the night stairs he cried out with an exceeding bitter cry: 'Accursed! Accursed! Ah me, accursed for ever!'"

And then the cellarer stopped suddenly with mouth agape, and the deacon, too, started and looked strangely saying, "Heard you anything?"

The cellarer breathed heavily. "'Twas fancy," he replied stoutly. "I thought the words were repeated. Ha, I have it. They come from the rock yonder. It is like the cliff near the Abbey, where they cut the last squared stone. There if you stand and shout, an echo of your own words comes back thrown off the wall of the Church. Ha, ha, yes, there is a tale told that Brother Simon once excused himself half his penance of Paternosters, for they had been spoken, said he, under the cliff: therefore each being repeated counted for two." But as the cellarer laughed nervously at his own story, he cast fearful glances behind and around.

"But," said the deacon, "here there is no Abbey wall to throw off the sound."

"True, but there is the other cliff."

"It may be so," said the deacon doubtfully. "Yet I have noted no echo in this place before. It is a dreadful tale you have told me. And the words written on his skin, what were they?"

The cellarer beat his breast.

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"I should endanger my own salvation if I told you. They were blasphemous, they were——"

And then he suddenly became rigid, and horror grew in his face and in the deacon's as they listened to the muffled cry that floated down to them.

"That is no echo," cried the cellarer in abject terror, "but the very words themselves that I saw written," and with a shuddering cry he fled back along the path to the Abbey. And the deacon fled, too, after him, and being the more active soon bounded past him, and coming to the entrance of the gorge he turned to the right by the path up the hill and through the woods towards Rippon; but the cellarer ran on and never stopped until he arrived with sobbing breath and starting eyes at the postern gate of the Abbey.

That night they spent long hours on their knees, the cellarer in the Choir of Fountains, and the deacon in the Church of St. Wilfrid at Rippon.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETURN OF JOCK AND THE KIDNAPPING OF RICHARD MARKENFIELD

It was nine of the clock. The door of the Toll Booth slammed as the Wakeman came out and with the keys jingling in his hand, went to join his underlings at the Market Cross. Here one of them stood ready with the huge town horn encircling his body, whilst the other swung a lantern. As the clang of the curfew bell rang out from the church tower, the horn-blower swelled out his chest with a deep breath, and the low resonant note of the horn boomed through the quiet of the evening. At the sound, the lights twinkling on the four sides of the Market Stead went out one by one, a few loiterers retreated within their house doors, and the Wakeman was left alone with his two watchers.

"Take good heed," was Master Terrie's last charge to his men. "Not a pennyworth of damage hath any man of Rippon taken from the gateside since the Twelve Brethren chose me for their Wakeman. I would not have the virginalty of my office smirched by any ill-doing 'twixt now and my outgate."

"Never fear," said the lantern bearer, "Your

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Worship's outgate supper shall be a notable one, and none to cast aught in your teeth. There shall be no talk there, as at Master Outhwaite's last back-end."

"Nay, John Taylor," replied the Wakeman austerely, but with a gratified look showing on his lean face in the light of the lantern, "make not ill comparisons. I have but followed my duty in watching over this town. Not a night have I missed in coming here to set the watch."

"That be so," said the talkative lantern bearer—the horn-blower had more reason to spare his breath—"That be so. Outhwaite was of another sort. Too fat was he, and liked his pot of ale over well. Nine of the clock found him oftener at the Black Dog than the Cross. Fined, too, for flitting o' the town was he, and the night of Hebden's fire, when men cried out upon Robert Doughill here, for that he rang not his bell till the whole town was gathered round Hebden's, the blame for it lay by right at Outhwaite's door, who had Robert for prop to help him up Bedern Bank, and stuck so fast to him that he could not away to his duty. The town was like to be burnt out that night, an there had been a wind."

"Fie! Taylor. Your tongue wags too fast," said the Wakeman severely. "The powers that be are ordained of God. Speak not evil of dignities."

Taylor shook his head reproachfully.

"Nay, nay, Your Worship, 'tis not John Taylor's way to miscall his betters. All men know John for

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a good liver and no backbiter, nor given to by-calling. But say what one will, these be evil times, what with the demon fires on Studley and Blois hills——”

“Ay,” broke in the horn-blower, who had now recovered his wind, “I misdoubt the Friars be at work again. Thomas Lytster, of Bloxengate, in the dead of night looking forth of his little window in the back of his house, saw in the moonlight a company of horsemen cross over by Coltsgate, and they seemed to be heading for Studley. When Sir William returns from Court he may find his fine house sacked, as others have.”

“Evil times, evil times,” repeated Taylor, shaking his head. “Robber friars carrying men off, and roystering bullies molesting us in our very streets. I mind that when Mad Mallory put Your Worship in the cask——”

But here the Wakeman turned abruptly on his heel.

“Silence, good fellow,” he said, “and give your clacking tongue a rest. Be vigilant, both of you, and apprehend all night-prowlers.”

As Master Terrie, with a good conscience, turned down Kirkgate on his way to his dwelling in St. Annesgate, a figure coming swiftly and unseen from behind passed him in the same direction. The Wakeman was about to call his watchmen to pursue and see who it was, but noting that this night-goer wore the garb of a churchman, he forbore, muttering

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to himself, "A vicar of the Church, maybe, returning belated," and so discreetly held on his way.

The tall churchman, with a mumbled greeting and averted face, passed the Wakeman by, and coming to the lower end of Kirkgate, turned to the right in the direction of the Bedern, where the vicars and other minor clergy had their hall and dwelling.

Under a window here he came to a stand, and stooping for a pebble, threw it up at the casement. In a moment a head was thrust out and said in a low tone :

"Is that you so late, Richard?" And the man below replied, "Not Richard, but John Draglea."

He at the window exclaimed quickly and in wonder, "I had thought you far away."

"I am but recently returned, Edmund, and dared not seek you out till now. But hist! the Wakeman cometh round the corner. I must be brief. I need your counsel, Edmund. Meet me two hours past noon at Bell Bank under the fallen elm."

Master Terrie, his suspicions re-awakened on seeing a man standing close under the Bedern, came running up and crying :

"Who goes there? Stand! I, the Wakeman, bid you."

But the stranger took to his heels, and scurrying through the churchyard and over a wall, made for the open country, where it was idle for the Wakeman to follow, who returning to his home in St. Annes-

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gate, shook his head at this scandalous proof of clerical ill-doing. Edmund Brown at sight of him quietly and unseen closed his casement window.

Unknown to Sir Christopher, who had sent to Hull, that search might be made for him to do Sir Ninian's will in the matter of the annulment, Jock was back near Rippon, harbouring with the Hermit of Hewick, barely more than a bowshot from the Canon's door.

Waiting until his uncle's wrath should cool, and fearing seizure by Sir Ninian in accordance with his threat at Hood, Jock kept in hiding for the present, sharing with Matthew the little chamber over the chapel on the bridge, his face well shadowed by the hood of the Hermit's second best habit, and passing for his brother on a visit from York.

With Jock to take his place and demand toll for the bridge from travellers, the Hermit was free to leave his charge and enjoy his beloved sport from morn till eve. After matins he could wander far up the Skell into the wildest gorges, to the meadow banks of the Laver, or where Yore twists and turns back upon itself under Norton Conyers, or he might even go so far afield as the bridge of Tanfield by the Marmions' Castle.

In the evening, Jock, leaning on the parapet of Hewick Bridge, would watch his host coming along the river path, the level sun glistening on his bald, red-fringed pate, and finding out pin-points of light

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in the fish scales clinging to his habit as he hurried to be in time for vespers in the little chapel.

If Jock's sturdy shoulders, masterful voice, and compelling eye drew unwilling coins from miserly pockets, the Hermit would not complain to find the collection box rapidly filling in his absence; and should Jock's keen sight detect a man of Rippon coming to the bridge he would draw his hood closer over his face and retire into the dim chapel, that none might suspect he was other than the Hermit's brother.

But on days when Matthew was loath to wander abroad, his habit tucked above his mighty calves, he fished the broad stretches of tumbling water immediately above or below the bridge and conveniently near to his chapel, while Jock, ensconced amid the bushes on the bank, would watch him fishing or on occasion bear a hand, or might wander up the river towards Rippon safe, if not too near, in the disguise of a churchman.

Sore and angry at Bertha's desertion and flight from Hull, and yet eager to know where she was and how she fared, Clotheram being on the opposite side to Hewick, he had not dared to risk detection passing through Rippon by day. But that evening, when he was seen by the Wakeman, he had paid a hasty visit in the dusk to the Manor of Clotheram, hoping he might discover if Bertha was there. But he found the Manor House barred and bolted, and so returning disconsolate, had under shelter of darkness sum-

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n.oned Edmund Brown to resolve his doubts in this matter and on others.

Not far above the Bridge of Hewick, in the meadows washed by the river, of the great elms that stood near the banks one had fallen, undermined by frequent spates, and in its fall snapping off its under branches, had driven their stumps deep into the earth. There it lay half-rooted, like a crippled giant, thrusting up green leafy arms as in prayer to Heaven to raise it from its sick bed, making an arched bower beneath its twisted broken back; and little leafy avenues between the half-buried limbs ran here and there, giving glimpses of the shining river and beyond the tree-clad summit of Ailcy Hill hard by St. Wilfrid's Tower.

Under the bower of the elm, hidden from curious eyes of passers-by on the river path, Jock lay waiting till Edmund Brown should come.

He had much to tell, much to ask; on many points he could not be resolved what he should do, and needed the sharp-witted young deacon's counsel.

Until his old schoolmate came, he wrestled with the matter by himself, stabbing his dagger into the turf as he lay beneath the elm.

"Firstly," he muttered, making a cross in the ground and cutting an R after it, "there is my promise to Richard that I would bar his wedding with Bertha. Secondly," with another cross, and a great A and a little v hanging to it, "my duty to my

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Uncle Christopher, who requires annulment of my marriage for Sir Ninian's sake. Item"—an N came here—"I swore Sir Ninian should be satisfied. Item"—with this a B bigger than all—"I have sworn to my lady that I would, if she willed it, undo what I have done, and that she should keep her gold from Sir Ninian and myself." Then glancing ruefully at the four capital letters, "How may all these be made to agree. Firstly, my promise to mar Richard's chance of marriage with Bertha, that——"

"That," said a quiet voice above, whilst a shadow fell across the sward, "that by St. Wilfrid's head, John Draglea, you have effectually done to the confusion of Sir Ninian."

John sprang up in delight.

"Edmund! The sight of you is as welcome as——"

"As your lady wife would be, doubtless," replied the young deacon dryly, sitting down on the bank to put on his hose and shoes, which he carried in his hand. "I crossed beyond the bend to escape inquisitive eyes that might wonder why I came this way."

Jock came out of his shelter and threw himself down by his side.

"Where is she, Edmund?" he asked. "Did she come to Clotheram?"

"Ay," replied the deacon, tugging at his hose to smooth out a fold in the instep. "She came, and

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when Sir Ninian knew, he sent and had her taken to Markenfield under colour that the Manor was not safe from the raids of the Friars. He has fresh hopes, it seems, that he may yet wed her to Richard, getting her marriage with you set aside as irregular. The lady, I am told, denied his right, since she is of age and free of wardship. But Sir Ninian's might is greater than her right, and so he keeps her at Markenfield."

Jock gave a sigh of regret. "She might be in worse hands," he said. "Know you the true tale, Edmund, of what happened at Hood?"

"As far as Dick Markenfield could give it and the letter which you sent him from Hull."

"Ah! he has that then? And you know——"

"That Jock Draglea cheated a helpless maiden."

A deep red overspread Jock's face, and he shifted uneasily to the other elbow, but listened in silence as Brown went on: "Jock Draglea cheated this maiden with motives black and white; black, to revenge himself for a girl's insolence; white, to drag a friend at all costs out of his difficulty."

"But how know you my motives, Edmund Brown?" protested Jock in consternation.

"I know them because I know John Draglea, himself black and white in chequers."

"True, Edmund," muttered Jock with shame in his face, "I have been a knave in this matter."

"Secondly," continued Brown, "conscience in

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Jock Draglea stung him—alas, after the wrong done."

"You know him well, Edmund."

"Therefore, Jock Draglea resolved to take no benefit to himself for his foul deed, but to abide the evil consequences in his own body and soul, be they what they may."

"Again true, Edmund."

"Thirdly, by companying with the maiden, who also is chequered black and white, something else befell, which makes matters still harder for him."

"Ay, Edmund, and what was that?" said Jock breathlessly.

"Why he incontinently fell in love with the wife he had hoped to scorn, and now, it seemeth, the maiden will have her foot on Jock's neck, and not Jock's on hers."

Draglea drew a long breath of amazement.

"My very thought as I lay waiting for you," he gasped. "There is wizard's magic in this, Edmund."

"Nay, I would not be burnt for witchcraft. This cometh of the love I bear you, Jock. I watch you, and I know you inside and out. Therefore could I read in your letter to Richard more than is written there."

"It is a marvel. And what do you counsel?"

"Part of this matter is still dark to me. What passed when you first overtook and fought with the Spaniard, as you call him, although I suspect the

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leader of the Friars, the Spaniard and Mad Mallory to be but one person?"

Jock continued to stare in wonder at the deacon, but without further comment began his tale.

"After the first onset, when the Spaniard had come back to pick up the wallet, as we paused a moment to breathe ourselves, he said: 'You are like to be beaten, clown; but even should you win, what would you win? Credit with Sir Ninian?'

"'I fight for possession of the lady,' said I.

"'What! would you wed with her?' he sneered. Then it was that monstrous intention was conceived in my heart. 'Why not?' thought I, and said to him:

"'Ay, we fight to see who shall wed the maiden, you or I.' Then he laughed loud and long, and said: 'Agreed! Let that be as under bond between us. Yet how shall you, Sir Clown, persuade the lady? She will go willingly with me to the priest, but not with you.'

"Then said I, 'If I beat you down and kill you, I win the lady and wed her how I may. But if I overcome you only and spare your life, then shall you be thereby bound to serve me in the matter as I will.'

"Again he cried, 'Agreed; the better man shall be the bridegroom,' and seemed much taken with the conceit; but after a moment's thought, 'Oho,' cried he, 'this way the conditions are ill-balanced and weigh towards you. Thus shall we better them. If

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the fight go otherwise, and I overcome and kill thee, that is well for me and an end to it. But if I, having power to kill, resolve to spare, then there must be some further advantage to me, and it shall be this: You shall become my man and join my troop, for I see you are a lad of spirit such as I love.'"

Here Jock paused in his tale.

"And you won the fight?" asked Brown.

"I beat him to his knees, and after that, since I spared him, we together plotted, with the aid of Sir Andrew and his men, who came up from Rippon to keep tryst with the Spaniard, we plotted, I say, how to deceive the maiden. Therefore we changed dress, and the Spaniard riding through the wood another way, warned the chapel priest what he should do, so that when I joined the Lady Bertha higher up the road, she alone of all those who came to the chapel was not in the plot."

Brown's face grew dark and stern.

"It was a villain's act," he said, "so to conspire against a silly, helpless maid. What devil of wickedness and madness entered into your heart, Jock Dragle?"

The other hung his head in shame.

"I have repented me bitterly since. For the maiden is not so ill as I thought. Bred as she was by old Clotheram, and listening to his tales of wickedness and violence, how could she be other, through no fault in her nature but only lack of gentle com-

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pany of women? But she had been insolent and saucy to me, and I swore by St. Wilfrid's head she should rue it, that some way I would master her and give her scorn for scorn."

"That John, priest of Hood, should be a party to it!" said Brown in wrath. "This shall come to the Cardinal's ear, and he shall be driven from his chantry."

"He was forced to it by the leader of the Friars and his men. He is under their hand in the shadow of the Hambletons. And now what would you have me do, Edmund? Should I aid Sir Ninian to have my marriage put aside? Yet I owe her a betterment not a worsening of her lot."

"If I advise you, Jock—no easy matter in such a tangle of circumstance—will you follow my counsels? You are ever the sport of your own sudden whims. You are like the flotsam and jetsam of this river brought down by last night's spate. See that stick in mid stream going fast towards the sea of destruction, or this other, that being driven a little aside by the ripples and eddies, is even now being cast up at our feet among the reeds, there to rot away."

"Why," said Jock, a wintry smile lighting up the gloom of his face, "that last is a goose-quill and no stick, a good goose-quill that will make a pen for fair writing, or at the least a float for Matthew the Hermit to fish withal, if it be cut and plugged each end. Now see, Edmund Brown," he continued, fol-

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lowing up the humour of his conceit. "See how I will better your fable, how thus stretching forth a saving right hand I will preserve this flotsam to a good end. So shall you, friend, by your good counsel save me from the waves, the rocks and the shoals of my frowardness."

"Pish!" said the young deacon, "you twist my allegory to a conclusion not intended by me. But see there, Matthew the Hermit waves his arms and shouts to us from the bridge, and now comes with disordered gait along the bank. Let us go to meet him and see what it is."

But Jock was now busy with the goose-quill, which he had fished out of the reeds. "Go you and see what he wants and I will follow. 'Tis but some monstrous chub or trout he has belike lost from the hook. Matthew takes many a sizable fish, but those he loses are always leviathans."

The deacon rose and hurried towards the Hermit, who met him half-way, and thereupon fell into excited talk with him, after which both shouted and beckoned to Jock, who came slowly towards them, his head bent over the quill.

"What news, Matthew?" he said abstractedly, when he came within hearing.

"Ill news," replied the Hermit, "which will be grievous to you, lad. Your dear friend Richard of Markenfield has been taken."

"Ay, by the Friars," said Jock, "I know it."

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Brown and the Hermit looked their wonder, and the deacon said reproachfully, "And you kept the news from me, Jock?"

"It came to me but now, friend Edmund, and there is the messenger," he explained, holding up the goose-quill and with it a scrap of paper. "This message was in the quill that just now I took from the river."

"The Saints preserve us," cried the Hermit when he understood, and crossing himself. "This is the hand of God."

"But what saith the message?"

Jock spelled it out with some difficulty.

"I, Richard Markenfield, am held to ransom by the Friars in a cavern through which floweth a stream. The stream shall carry thus my message. Who findeth it, haste with all speed to Sir Ninian. Bid him come with a company: a score or so will suffice, that he may rescue me and save the ransom, which they fix at ten thousand crowns."

A look of doubt spread over Brown's face. "This is past all belief. Think how long it would take your messenger quill to float from its cavern as far as this. When was Richard taken, did Sir Ninian's rider say?" he asked of the Hermit.

"As he rode over the bridge his saddle slipped, and though in hot haste, he dismounted to brace up the girth, or I had not got the news. He was riding to Sir Simon Ward of Givendale to ask for men to

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sweep the Hambletons and search every cranny for Sir Ninian's son. The tale he told was that Carter, who went with Richard Markenfield towards Thirsk a sennight to-day, had come in this morning with a bloody bandage round his head now three days old. Both had been kept by the Friars till they used Carter as messenger to claim the ransom."

"Then Carter knows where he is?"

"Not so; both were blindfolded and carried away many miles. Carter was kept in darkness throughout, and when set free and his bandage again loosed found himself at the same spot where they were taken."

Brown turned to Jock. "Now may you wipe out one of your debts, that to Sir Ninian. But recover his son for him, and his displeasure will vanish and the cloud pass from the Canon too."

"But," said the Hermit, tugging at his red fringe of beard in perplexity, "how came the message by water from the Hambletons?"

Jock's face fell, the impossibility striking him at once!

"Or by so swift a journey, in three to four days at most?" added Brown after a pause.

"That might be," replied the Hermit, "if it travelled by Yore all the way. Last night's spate would bring it many miles, but not from the Hambletons. No water from the dales there finds its way into Yore across the Vale of Mowbray."

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"Then his prison cannot be in the Hambletons at all," said Brown with decision.

"They took them between Thirsk and Topcliffe, said Carter, and after blindfolding both they rode hard for some three hours before they dismounted. So the tale goes," said the Hermit.

"Ah! Then it may have been somewhere up Yore after all," exclaimed Brown.

"It must be," insisted Jock, holding up the quill. "This was found where we sat just below the meeting of Skell and Yore. Skell or Yore, how are we to know down which stream it came?"

"Easily enough," cried Brown. "Cut us two quills, Hermit, like this, and plug them each end, of length and thickness the same, and inside let there be in each a little scroll of selfsame size and weight. One shall Jock drop in midmost stream standing on the stepping-stones that cross Skell a stone's cast from the meeting of the waters. 'Tis a quiet spot, and you will meet none as you go. And I will fling the other from the middle arch of the North Bridge. Then shall we see which comes nearest to our patch of reeds."

Jock nodded in approval.

"Well conceived, Edmund, but when that is done what caves do we know up Yore or Skell from which issues the stream? And there is Laver to reckon with."

The Hermit answered the question.

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"Far away beyond Middleham Castle, before you come to Semmerwater, there be deep holes in the rocks. The cave might be in the limestone near Fountains and Grantley on the Skell, tho' I have seen none."

After that there was much talk between those three on this matter and the miraculous discovery of Richard's message, but in the end trial was made of the quills, and it was Jock's, sent forth on its voyage from the stepping-stones of Skell, that ran aground nearest to the patch of reeds where the message was found. Yet still a doubt was left whether the upper waters of the Skell or the Laver which joins it above Rippon near the mill, should first be searched. But finally it was agreed that they should divide, the deacon tracing Laver upwards on the morrow, whilst Jock, starting from their junction, should examine the wilder and deeper gorges of Skell; and it was further agreed that they should set forth soon after light next day.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEARCH FOR RICHARD'S PRISON HOUSE

JOCK slept soundly that night, lulled by the murmur of waters swirling under the arches of the bridge, but towards dawn his slumbers were broken by a cry of "Jock! Jock!" from without. As he yawned and rubbed his eyes the call came more insistently: "Jock, awake and come forth."

Leaving the Hermit snoring undisturbed by the call, Jock rose reluctantly, and muttering, "It is full early. 'Tis Edmund's voice, but what can he want?" went down the narrow winding stair, and drawing the bolt, found the deacon standing there.

There was a faint glow of dawn in the sky over Skelton, and what light there was fell on the face of Edmund Brown, showing his eyes sparkling and alight with excitement. He took Jock by the sleeve and led him to the bridge. "Listen, Jock Draglea," he said, his voice high and exultant. "This night the holy St. Wilfrid has spoken and told me where Richard is imprisoned. I come thus early to prevent your setting forth unguided in your search up Skell."

There was nothing but disbelief in Jock's gruff and sleepy reply.

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"You are still dreaming, Edmund. What message could have come to you? Have you heard aught fresh from Markenfield?"

"Of this be sure. I can guide you straight to Richard's prison."

"Then shall he at once be set free. But before we start," continued Jock, still in doubt, "it were well to know whither and why we go."

"After I left you here I went back to Rippon, and Richard in the hands of the Friars was not out of my mind till I laid myself down to sleep. When vespers were ended, I lingered in the church at the tomb of Sir Thomas of Markenfield. I knelt down by the images of him and Dionisia his wife, and prayed to St. Wilfrid to direct you and me in our search. And going to the Bedern I was soon asleep, and a dream came to me in the night. I dreamt that I still knelt by Markenfield's tomb, and there was much noise and shouting that came from Kirkgate, and I knew in my heart that it was the people bringing St. Wilfrid on horseback, as the custom is at the time of his festival. And soon the door on the north side opened and St. Wilfrid, in his robes, as we dress him each year, passed by, and seeing me kneeling and praying by the tomb, he paused and laid his hand on my head, and saying, 'Search for Markenfield where the lost soul cries out to his God,' so passed on and turned beneath the rood into the choir. Then I awoke and knew it was a dream."

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"Ay," said Jock, "only a dream, and little guidance to us in our search, methinks."

"You are mistaken. I am persuaded that the saint did indeed come to me in my sleep and that this is a very message coming through the gate of horn."

Jock shook his head unconvinced.

"It seems to me, Edmund, that if it was in sooth the saint, he told you little that can be of use to us. There be many lost souls in many parts crying out to their God, not in caverns only."

"Ah, unbeliever! But this dream message hath a meaning in it that only I could resolve." Then the deacon told him how he and the cellarer of Fountains had been in the gorge beneath the Devil's Chimney, and had heard cries of anguish issuing from it, cries in very truth of a lost soul in bitter supplication to Heaven.

At mention of the Devil's Chimney the mocking smile on Jock's face died out, and he said eagerly, casting his eyes on the ground in thought: "The Devil's Chimney? There be something more in this than dreams."

From that moment Jock's manner changed, and he was now full of impatience to start for the Devil's Chimney.

"We may want a pick for breaking into this cavern of yours, Edmund," he said, and at once went to the back of the chapel, where, under a pentice, the Hermit kept his tools for mending the

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bridge. Pick and shovel he threw across his shoulder and handed to the deacon a wallet containing bread and cheese to fasten to his belt.

"For," said he, "there is a long day's work ahead of us, before ever we come into that cavern."

When they set out, it was not the deacon who led the way, eager though he had been, but Jock, who strode in front no longer in any hesitation or doubt.

And the way he took was along the banks of Skell, though that course brought them under the very windows of the Canon's house. There, however, there was none looking forth at that early hour but few on this side of the town were astir. Even the neatherd had not yet sounded his horn to take out the townsmen's cattle to the common grazing-grounds.

Jock on the one side, and the deacon on the other, they searched the banks closely, looking to find stranded some other message from the prisoner. And so they went on to where Laver comes into Skell below the milldam. And being now clear of the last straggling houses of the city, they walked slower, with keener search than ever, and yet found nothing and the deacon doubted up which of the two rivers would be the likeliest way.

But Jock went on, and leaving the main stream, led Edmund up a smaller stream that joins near this point, and when the deacon would have done otherwise, Jock said, "If up this we find nothing, we can turn back to the main stream."

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And the lesser stream led them at last to a thicket fringed dell in which was a reedy swamp at the lower end and beyond the reeds a deep dark pool bubbling up under a bank.

The Jock, standing above the pool and looking down into it, said: "Rememberest thou the day, some five years gone, when we bathed in this pool and could not bottom its deepest end?"

"Not once, but many times, have we and Dick Markenfield bathed here in the hot summer days," replied the deacon carelessly, "but I shall be making forwa to the other stream had forgot, methinks, that this came in that way."

"Nay," said Jock, "though thou wast silent and I longed for no other message, yet I was assured that the search begins here. Your vision was a true one, Enoch, but it is strange it showed you not the meaning of this pool. When we played as boys here, what came bubbling up one day?"

Then a glint of understanding flashed in the deacon's eyes. "A lack-wit I not to have understood! We put sawdust into Skell under the Devil's Chimney, a little way from here, and out it came under the hill into this pool."

"And what more likely," said Jock, "than a cave where the stream goes underground, at the very place where you heard the lost spirit cry out? And so your dream comes true."

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But the deacon's eager face clouded over with a passing doubt.

"How could a goose-quill come out by such a tiny passage and muddy outlets with so much to catch and stay it?"

"Nay, you are the doubting Thomas now," taunted Jock. "Do you put your faith still in St. Wilfrid, Edmund. As for me I will bear in mind the strong spate of yesterday, which might well force that goose-quill past any obstacle."

It was at that moment that the deacon's eye, roving round the pool, became fixed on an object at the lower end, and with a cry he ran round and darted upon something, which he brought in triumph to Jock, who saw a quill like that found in the Yore; but this one was sealed with red wax, catching the eye more readily as it lay among the reeds. And within was a scroll, as before, bearing the same message.

"Now," said Jock, "am I assured that Richard is near at hand?"

"But how shall we find the cave? And when we come to it, how break through those who guard it, unless we go to Sir Ninian for aid?"

"That shall never be. With my own hand, except for thy aid, will I set him free."

"We must first search for the entrance somewhere amid the woods on this hill."

"We will rather creep through by a back door

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that I know of," said Jock with a laugh, "and so we will come on them unawares. And the back door is down by the pool in the gorge, where you stood when you heard the cry of the lost spirit."

After that Jock essayed to go up over the hill and down into the gorge, that being the shortest way, but the deacon drew him back.

"It will never do for you to be seen from the lodge on the slope of the hill, whether by Mallory or some other ill-wisher of yours, who might betray you to Sir Ninian."

"Ah, I had forgot the Mallorys' lodge," mused Jock, "and there may be spies out from it to look down upon us from the cliff top, whilst we work below."

Then it was agreed that Edmund, using all caution to conceal himself amongst the trees and the underwood, should go up and reconnoitre the hunting lodge, whilst Jock made his way by a longer compass round the hill and into the gorge at the lower end, and there at the Devil's Chimney should join Edmund descending it from above.

Now this hunting lodge of the Mallorys stood a little way retired from the edge of the cliff, on the downward slope of the hill facing towards Rippon and peeping out above the lower trees in which it was embosomed.

The deacon crept through the underwood until he reached the little clearing in front of the lodge, and,

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remaining still in the cover of the wood, he looked out upon it, doubting whether he should go nearer to see if anyone was within.

Whilst he waited, the door was thrown open and a man came out, who had to stoop upon the threshold, so great in stature was he, and withal when he drew himself upright outside in the light of the early sun, it could be seen that he was mighty in girth as well as stature; and in his hands he carried a shield big of circle and covered with leather; but otherwise, except for the dagger at his belt, he wore no weapon nor armour.

And going to the back of the house, he mounted a flat-topped ridge that rose abruptly there overlooking the lodge. There he took his stand at the highest point, and after he had stripped the shield of its leather case, he turned it so as to face the risen sun, and as he twirled it about, it glittered with exceeding brilliancy, being highly polished, as though it had been a glass mirror; and once the rays from it struck full in the deacon's eyes, where he crouched, and so blinded him with the light that for some minutes he saw as in a haze the figure of the tall man flashing the shield this way and that.

And suddenly the deacon saw the meaning of it, that this flashing light, which could be seen at a great distance, was a signal to someone far off, and he noted that the giant fronted the east as he flashed his mirror, and when he had finished he put the shield

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again into its case, and descending the ridge, went back into the lodge.

And not daring now to look into the lodge by way of the door or the window, the deacon fetched a compass round it, and coming to the edge of the cliff, lowered himself cautiously by the snaky roots of the trees that twisted all ways over the stony surface, or overhung the valley, and so sliding down he lay in waiting for Jock.

Meantime Jock had gone on his way round the hill, so as to come to Skell at a lower part, where it passes out of the gorge under the Mackershaw wood, intending to follow it up afterwards as far as the Devil's Chimney.

But when he reached the river, noting with satisfaction that here the bed was dry, he stopped irresolute with a longing look on the path opposite, for this pointed straight for Markenfield. In a few minutes a quick run would take him this way to Sir Ninian's towers. By a lucky chance he might get sight of the Lady Bertha walking in the garden between the moat and the walls. So much liberty they were like to allow her for health's sake. Edmund would take some time to reconnoitre the lodge. And so with a brief hesitation he crossed the river-bed and mounted the footpath on the other side, which wound deep in bracken amidst the boles of great beech trees, through the wooded hollow which is called Mackershaw Trough.

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But though the sun's orb was barely clear of the Hambleton skyline, sending level rays across church battlements and city thatched roofs into the green dells of the Mackershaw, someone besides Jock was astir in the woods, for a sudden rustling of the underwoods ahead and the beat of a quick footfall made him crouch close in the bracken, where he could peer upwards along the narrow track and be unseen himself.

As he raised his head cautiously, he caught his breath in a gasp of wonder, and his heart hammered hard against his breast bones in a way that a whole company of troopers ringing him round with their spear points had not quickened it.

Adown the path came leaping in long strides a girl, a very goddess it seemed to him, her tresses streaming behind in the speed of her motion, the early sunlight flickering in their strands, her red lips open to catch the scant air.

When some threescore paces off, she stopped suddenly and stood with heaving bosom and mouth agape, for her gaze had fallen on Jock's wide-eyed face lifting above the green in her path. A moment she stood there, struck still, like Lot's wife become a statue, then turned to leap aside among the beech trunks, but Jock rising to his full height, held up his hand and cried, "Whither do you fly? Who pursues you, Lady Bertha?"

At that the look of the hunted passed out of her eyes, and she came with even steps where Jock

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awaited, and standing before him said, "I have fled from Markenfield, and I fear the pursuers are even now after me."

As she spoke there broke forth a distant hubbub from Markenfield, which changed to single cries and shouts that began soon to grow loud and near.

Bertha looked about her in vexation rather than in fear. She was all flushed and disordered with running.

"I must hide," she said, "but where?"

Jock stepped between her and the pursuit. "They shall not take you," he said.

She shook her head vigorously.

"They will be many, some five or six at least, and others to follow. You are not even armed, except with that. They will shoot you down from afar."

And Jock remembered ruefully that he had come with but a pick for weapon and the dagger in his belt. He cast his eye hurriedly over the path by which she came.

"Look," said he, "the ground here is soft and showeth plainly your footprint, but higher it is hard."

Then he showed her how to walk backwards, carefully planting her feet where she had trod before until she reached the stony ground where there was no mark, first smoothing out his own prints from the brushwood. Some thirty paces they went so, and then telling her to stop where she stood, and approaching

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lightly as near as he might, he stretched out a helping hand, and thus, with a leap and a pull, she sprang lightly over the bracken tops on to the hard ground, and stooping low—for now the crash and cries of men drew near—they ran hand-in-hand up the slope; but the first of the pursuers suddenly coming into sight from amongst the trees, Jock dragged Bertha down with him beneath the bracken before they could be seen, and there they hid panting until the men from Markenfield had swept by.

Now the first pair were unarmed and bareheaded, their points unlaced and their hose falling about their heels, since at the first alarm they had started hot-foot just as they were, newly roused from their beds. And it was well that Jock did not at once rise from their hiding-place when those had gone by, for at a long interval came others armed with swords and crossbows, and from their talk as they ran by it was easy at so short a distance to guess that they were bound, as they thought, for Clotheram Tower, where, no doubt, the lady would take refuge, and they might have to hale her forth by force in the teeth of the garrison.

The two first in their haste had over-run the spot where Bertha's track came to an end, and the others followed their lead, none, it seemed, doubting that she had taken the path across the ford.

Then Jock raised Bertha by the hand, and they ran forward again to the broad and open hill-top.

So far, they ran hand-in-hand, crouching low

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whilst there was fear they might be seen from the woodland path below, but when they were come over the upper edge and were safe for the moment from the eyes of their pursuers, their hands unlocked, whilst they straightened themselves and drew apart a little space. And first spake Jock, with such austerity as he might, to the maiden panting and glowing at his side.

"Art not afeared to company with me?"

"Afeared, by Our Lady!" she replied, with a surprised toss of the head, her anger mounting. "Bertha of Clotheram to fear! What mean you?"

"Didst thou not fly from me at Hull? Ay, and bribe me not to follow?"

At that her anger grew less.

"There was no bribe. You had it in your power to take all, and yet gave all back." Jock's brow relaxed from its enforced severity, while Bertha continued:

"And for flying from you, had we not a loathing for one another's company? Said you not that you would find a way of breaking the chain that bound us? Should I not fly from you after such talk?"

Jock looked searchingly into her face in doubt what her meaning might be. Was it regret? The glitter in her eye and the angry set of her mouth killed that thought. Annoyed that he himself might have appeared to weaken in their antagonism, he gave a

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scornful laugh, turning his head away with a jerk, and so he saw not the loosening of her tight-held lips nor the smile that softened her eyes.

"I keep my word," he said sullenly, "you shall be free, if I can make you so. Meantime Fate throws us together. You are in danger from Sir Ninian, and, like it or not, must take aid from him you scorn."

"Nay, I am not an ingrate nor ungenerous. I will not be wife to you. That cannot be. Yet why may we not be friends?"

"Friends?" echoed Jock bitterly.

"Ay, friends. Ah! the coward blow I struck you. Does that rankle yet? What if I repent that and the gibes I threw at you?"

Jock stammered and looked confused. It was his boast that he ever kept his word in matters great and small, and even in this was resolved to make it good. But Bertha, with a good-humoured laugh, saved him the need for a reply.

"Well, la, la. Let be. Talk not of it and time will show."

After this they fell both into a musing fit, and so came where the hill drops suddenly into the cleft of the Skell. There they stood looking over and to the left at the Devil's Chimney rising high.

"To come at Clotheram or other shelter for you," said Jock thoughtfully, "we must pass yonder, since all other roads will be beset by Markenfield's men

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searching for you. But they will not lightly venture where the devil or one of his chief fiends has his stronghold. You know the tale. Are you afear'd?"

"Again that word," said Bertha scornfully; "I fear naught."

"There be gruesome tales told," insisted Jock, looking steadily at her, "of fiends seen dancing round their fires on Gillett Hill yonder."

"Ralph of Clotheram feared neither man nor devil, and shall I, his daughter? Not even John, the chapel priest, could frighten him on his death-bed with the fires of hell, and shall I be terrified by a bogey tale? Hush, what is that?"

The light from the east had by this time spread farther over the sky, but there was yet on all things the stillness of early dawn. Across the valley there stole upon their ears a dying strain of wailing music. At such a time and place there was a ghostly sound about it, and Jock looked curiously to see how his companion would take it, and noted that though she stood firm and braced, yet her cheek had paled, as she said with a forced laugh:

"'Tis a slow and solemn air, and cometh, mayhap, from the monks yonder at their prayers."

Jock shook his head.

"The Abbey Church is little short of a mile distant up the Skell, and these sounds be much nearer. I have my own idea whence they come. It fits well

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with—but come, on this bare hill-top we might yet be sighted by Markenfield's men. We must get down amongst the bushes."

Now hard by where they stood the rains of winter had worn a sloping hollow down the cliff side, fronting the Devil's Chimney, affording an easier descent, and here Jock led the way. They were but half-way, when a low cry came from opposite, and a white face appeared in the greenery over the way, and soon there emerged carefully the person of Edmund Brown, who, with a sign to them of caution, clambered to the bottom and across the boulder-strewn stream, and they went to meet him on the green sward in the bend of its course.

The deacon was scared and breathless. He had heard the music, he said, which came from the edge of the ravine overhead, and he feared someone from the hunting lodge on Gillett Hill might detect their presence and spoil the plan of search. With exclamations of wonder at seeing Bertha there he drew them within cover of some underwood, and there rapidly described to Jock what he had seen on Gillett Hill.

Jock accounted briefly for Bertha's presence and quieted the deacon's fears.

"As for the strains of music, Edmund, right glad I am to hear them, for if I be not much in error, they were played by Richard Markenfield himself, and therefore he cannot be far to seek."

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The deacon gave a startled cry of sudden understanding.

"That should forget Dick's dolorous scraping! and the mournful air that the songmaster was at so much pains to teach him! Then must he be captive in the lodge above."

"You forget the message spoke of a cavern out of which flowed a stream."

"Ah, now I understand. Within the hill itself. But how find a way into it?"

"Within ten paces of this the most part of the waters lose themselves beneath the cliff."

Now where they stood on the edge of the Skell it gushed by over pebbles and between boulders, until it struck upon the side of the ravine not many yards away, and, dropping down a slanting bed, spread into a deep, sullen pool that lapped the limestone wall, and fallen leaves circled round upon its surface, whilst only a tiny trickle issued from it, barely wetting the lower reaches of the rocky bed.

To the edge of this black pool the two men silently crept and gazed into its depths, Bertha in much wonder at their words following behind; and as they looked, there was a movement deep down in the waters, and the flashing through them of some grey body, that suddenly rising to the surface flapped and fluttered with a screech until it disappeared within the bushes of the cliff.

"A coot," said the deacon.

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"Ay," replied Jock in triumph, "and there was no coot on the surface when my eye first fell on the pool from above. That will I swear."

"I know the keenness of your vision, and therefore you would say——"

"Therefore it must have its home within the rock, and I suspect that where the coot can go I might too."

So eager was he to begin the search that he had seized the pick which he had cast to the ground in his talk with the deacon, and was about to enter the pool, when he was reminded that he had in hand another matter as pressing.

"But first I must go with the Lady Bertha, Edmund, and place her where she may be safe from Markenfield men."

"Odds life! I can safeguard myself," said she coolly, seating herself on a boulder near; "rather will I keep watch and ward for you against any that may come this way."

"But if all goes well," said Jock, "I hope soon to be within the rock, leaving you alone."

"The deacon then can stand by me."

"One must keep watch above," said Brown, "to guard against the man in the lodge, who might hear thy pick, if thou art not careful, Jock."

"I will strike warily," said Jock. "Yet 'tis only prudent that you should keep watch above."

"And I here below," said the girl stoutly. "I

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may not be driven away against my will. Whatever befall, I will see out this search."

Jock, knowing something of her obstinacy, and at this time not being anxious to thwart it in his eagerness for the search, with some grumbling agreed that she should stay, and that the deacon should keep a double outlook on the lodge above and over her safety below.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLUE OF THE GOOSE-QUILL LEADS TO THE DISCOVERY OF RICHARD

AND so, without removing hose or shoon, since the heat was great, Jock stepped into the water up to his waist, and reaching down, he felt along the face of the rock under the water, until he came to a place where the roots of a tree, that had found a footing on a ledge above, hung out, forming a sort of arch over the pool; and here he felt the water sucking his hand, drawing it into a hole in the rock, beyond which he could feel nothing solid. And stooping still more, he measured out with his hands a hollow space some two yards long, but at most not more than a foot wide and in parts much less, with its top edge a hand's breadth below the surface of the pool.

Cautiously picking at the rock, so that the shaly stone fell noiselessly into the water, in half an hour he had hollowed a low arch, into which he advanced on his knees with his shoulders just above the surface, and he might not make his arch higher by reason of the stout roots of the tree, since he feared he might bring tree and all upon him. But when he had worked his arch more than his own length into the

The Clue of the Goose-Quill

rock, the pick struck through into an empty space, and the stream following into it, at once the surface of the pool fell some inches, and stooping down he was able to creep into a dark place, where a few steps onward the water was first knee-deep, and then reached only a little above his ankles.

He turned back to announce his discovery and to call the deacon to help him. He had taken but one step when he heard a cry of warning from Bertha, and then there was a rumbling about his ears and total darkness.

But Jock had not come cavern-hunting without careful purveyance of what might be needed. The rushlights and tinder-box which he had taken out of his belt and slung round his neck were still untouched by water.

He felt for the rock on his right hand, and was delighted to find that at a certain height it was dry and dusty. So here, resting his tinder-box in a little crevice, he fumbled and struck in the dark until the tinder caught, and he soon had one of the rushlights throwing its rays around him.

Its dim light showed a tunnel-like passage, and was reflected in the shallow stream that covered the floor. On the walls were marks that showed the utmost level to which the waters could reach.

Moving easily forward, he came to a place where the roof descended and the walls approached one another, so that he had to stoop lower and lower,

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guarding with difficulty the flame of the rushlight, which had to be carried not many inches above the stream; and so he stumbled on, the roof now rising, now descending, till he came to a point where he could scarcely force his body through the narrowed passage, and the flood thus constricted rose so close to the roof that his head being thrown back, his hair lay upon the water, whilst the light held high up was in danger of being blown out by a strong current of air. And it had gone hard with him if this had happened, for the tinder-box round his neck was drenched. But by good hap and careful nursing and shielding with the hollow of his hand he brought the little flame safely through, though but an inch of tallow was dry.

And he now became aware that he had come into a larger room, but dared not yet look about him, until he had dried so well as he might another of the candles that hung in a ring round his neck, and with much spluttering had got that, too, well alight from the other, so that now he had two, since all hope of lighting another with the tinder was gone.

And this chamber was like the hall of a great castle, supported by rough-hewn pillars of fantastic shape, not in even rows, but in no certain order, and from the roof which was in some places high and in others much lower, there hung pointed masses of rock, and up to them from the floor rose others that were like them, and in and out between these, deep-

The Clue of the Goose-Quill

cut in the rocky bottom, ran the stream, until it was lost to sight behind the pillars of rock.

Now it is not to be understood that Jock saw all this at a glance when he came out of the narrow passage, but only as the light showed up each object, as he followed the course of the stream. On the one side to the left he saw other dark passages running up into the rock, but on the right the wall curved round somewhat in a half circle.

And now, feeling very confident that he was come into Richard's prison, and fearing that his captors, issuing forth from one of the dark passages on the left, might take him at an advantage, in order to secure his retreat, he went back and set one of his candles firm in its own grease on a table of stone hard by the arched entrance, and thus having set free his right hand, he took into it the pick which he had fastened to his belt, and so went on skirting the wall on the right with a wary eye on the passages to the left; and now, his eyes less dazzled by bearing one candle only, he saw that at the far end of this hall there was a faint yellow gleam.

A little farther on the pillars of rock fell away to either side, and the stream running alongside the right wall left clear a wide level floor, but Jock withdrew into the deeper shadow of a pillar, for all round there were signs that this place was inhabited by men. On the upper part of the floor rushes were strewn, and from nails in the pillars hung two

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lanterns, from which came the dim yellow light, and on others were suits of armour and even rich doublets and cloaks.

Nowhere could be seen any person, and so he strode stealthily on to the upper part, where a great buttress of rock stood out almost into the middle of the chamber, the stream gurgling into a hole at its base. As he was rounding this, he saw that another light shone from behind it, and suddenly, almost at his elbow, it seemed, there began the clear tones of a praying voice.

For a moment he peered cautiously round the buttress, and then in amazement took two steps forward, and stood fronting a trestle-board, behind which knelt Richard Markenfield with hands clasped at his prayers.

Markenfield agape with wonder, stared dumbly at Jock's face, lit strangely by the candle on the board, so that Jock was the first to speak in much joy.

"The Saints be praised, Dick. Now is my task part done."

And Markenfield, rising to his feet and recovering somewhat from his amazement, replied in eagerness :

"If it be not your ghost only, Jock, I, too, thank Heaven. I knew you would rescue me if you could find where I was imprisoned. Ah, the quill it was that brought you. Was it not so? Commend me for the cunning of that quill. I asked for pen and ink, parchment and books to while away the wear-

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ness of my captivity. I should have fashioned and sent forth another to-day. Each day there has been one. The pen was worn, said I, and cast away. That it should reach you even from the Hambletons! And more amazing that you should find it rather than another! And you? I thought you in Hull. How came you to know?"

Jock held up his hands in amused protest.

"These be many questions and much to answer, and after that greater ado to get you forth. Therefore, in brief, you are in no Hambletons, but under Gillett Hill, within sound of cock at your own Hall of Markenfield."

"God's truth! Impossible!"

"Impossible, if you will, but for St. Wilfrid's guidance. Brown has it that he showed him in a dream, and true it is that what he said made me think of this place."

"I can believe it," said Markenfield, crossing himself devoutly.

"Well, however that may be, let me say on, for time is short. Your quill floating down the Skell but a little league was found by Edmund Brown and myself, I being late returned from Hull."

"But how did you break in? I heard no sound of conflict. And to steal in, that might not be, so closely is it guarded."

Jock smiled broadly.

"I came in at the back door, where no guard was

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set," then frowned, as he recollected that the back door was now barred and bolted against his exit. Markenfield knit his brows in perplexity.

"The back door; was there one?"

"Ay, but that way 'twill take some getting forth, I am thinking. We must try some speedier outlet."

"'Tis an amazing tale you tell me, but the clearer setting forth of it must wait for another time. For the present we must think only of escape."

"Which will not be so easy, my masters," came with a laugh out of the darkness on the left. With a start both Jock and Markenfield swung round to it, and saw Sir Andrew emerge into the circle of light, with his drawn sword in his hand.

"Nay," said Sir Andrew in a warning tone as Jock grasped his pick and Markenfield seized the heavy candlestick on the table, both threatening a furious onslaught on the giant. "Nay, 'twill not serve. There are others behind guarding the only outlet. Look not so fierce at me, Master Draglea. You are very welcome. As for the way you came in, the rock is fallen in and that road is blocked."

"How know you where I came in?" said Jock sullenly.

Sir Andrew gave a great laugh.

"Rare sport it was your burrowing in the cliff whilst we watched you from the top. And the cleric's face, when it rose sweating above the cliff edge and found us waiting for him."

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"And what of the Lady Bertha?"

"Your lady wife is safe in the cleric's keeping."

At that a load of care was lifted from Jock's heart.

"Give me a sword, Sir Andrew," he cried eagerly, "and I will fight you for Markenfield's ransom, remaining myself in exchange for him for you to do with me what you will."

The cool audacity of the offer took the giant's breath away. He looked with amused admiration, and then said with a sigh:

"It's not like me to refuse a fight, lad, but the stake is too enormous, I may not risk it. Mallory would cry shame on me for imperilling his ten thousand crowns. There is little gain in cutting your throat, if that be lost."

"But if you hold me prisoner, for me at least you will get no ransom. Neither Sir Christopher nor Sir Ninian would now pay a penny piece to set me free."

"May be, may be," repeated Sir Andrew, tugging at his beard, "but you might serve our turn in another manner."

"Then take me to Sir Wilfred and we will see what are his demands."

"Ay, there's the rub," replied Sir Andrew, dropping into a confidential tone; "Sir Wilfred is in no case to parley with you on this matter. There's a bargain to be struck, no doubt, but Sir Wilfred Mallory . . . Look you," he suddenly broke off, "I

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will show you Sir Wilfred. Come with me and you shall see for yourself," and waving him on he led the way to the dark passage out of which he had come.

Jock followed, and Markenfield would have done so too, but Sir Andrew told him to remain.

"This touches Draglea only. Wait you there till we return."

Jock and Richard conferred with one another for a few moments in low tones, and it was agreed that Jock should go alone. So the knight went forward and Jock close behind him, and as they went Jock said :

"I have reason enough for striking you down from behind, Sir Andrew."

But he only turned his head over his shoulder with a careless laugh.

"Not knave enough, lad, I'll wager. Besides, what use would it be? Without me you will never get out."

"A vast and wondrous place!—and hath many other chambers and passages, doubtless?" said Jock in an inquiring tone.

"Ay," came echoing back to him under the low roof of the passage, "a snug shelter for us friars, where we could bide unsuspected whilst they scoured our other hiding-places in the Hambletons. With abundance of stores we could eat, drink and laugh while they rode the hills looking for us. And when

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the search died away, we shifted our quarters again."

"And what if Markenfield and I, when we get free, warn Sir Ninian of this robbers' den at his very gates?" said Jock boldly.

Sir Andrew drew back by his side, and throwing the light of the lantern on Jock's face, said in an angrier tone :

"If that were likely, it might be more prudent to silence both of you."

"I make no promises," replied Jock, throwing up his head, "and you shall wring none from me."

The giant dropped back into his more usual jesting manner.

"Ay, lad, I know your stiffneckedness. But it matters not, for as the game goes now, Mallory and I will be far away when Sir Ninian pokes his fox nose into our rabbit warren. He may have possession for all we shall care. It will serve him for a cellar or a chapel crypt."

Whilst they talked, the passage was leading them steeply upwards, and soon they reached a spot where, on the left, was the foot of a ladder, and at its top could be seen bright rays of daylight coming through chinks. Here Jock prayed in his heart they might ascend, expecting that this would be a way of escape, but Sir Andrew led on a few yards beyond, where a curtain was drawn across the passage. This, after a sign to Jock to be silent, and going on tiptoe him-

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self with much caution, he pulled aside, disclosing a little room lighted by wax candles set on one side in niches in the rock.

At first Jock could see nothing but a great rood standing opposite the whole height from roof to floor, and the candles shone full upon the face of the Christ on the rood. But after gazing on this a little, he became aware of a dark figure stretched out upon the floor before the rood, and his eyes becoming a little more accustomed to the half-light, he saw that it was the body of a man lying on his face with his arms flung out crosswise, and the stillness of the little chamber was broken by deep groans and sighs.

Jock turned to ask who it was, but Sir Andrew hastily signed to him again to be silent, and only when he had noiselessly replaced the curtain and they had withdrawn a few steps down the passage, did he say in a hoarse whisper :

"So he hath lain since vespers three nights ago, and a whole sennight no man hath had speech of him. Therefore must you and Markenfield deal with me alone since Sir Wilfred for the nonce is as one dead."

There was much in Sir Andrew's words, and the sight they had been looking at for Jock to think upon, but the ladder running in his mind put out all other thoughts. The ladder pointed the way up out of his pit of captivity into the free light of day, and he was not minded to return with Sir Andrew down that slope

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into the gloomy halls below. There he would be helpless single-handed to rescue Markenfield, whereas from the outside, with the knowledge he had gained, his task would be lighter. Besides, there was Bertha to be succoured. But how to reach the top of the ladder with the giant close by? He must act at once or the chance would be gone. Yet to strike at Sir Andrew's broad back from behind seemed too treacherous in spite of the warning which he had given partly in jest. Suddenly, therefore, at the very foot of the ladder he cried out:

"Stand and face me, Sir Andrew, for here you or I must go down."

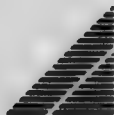
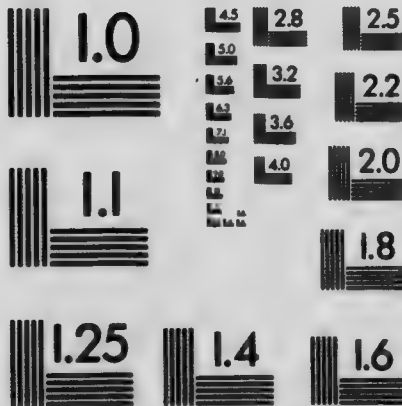
At that the giant, facing quickly round and making to draw his sword, before he could do so, Jock, letting fall his pick, drew back to get room for his rush, and then hurled all his weight upon the other man. And he, in spite of his bulk, went down upon his back under the shock. Then Jock, gathering himself up whilst Sir Andrew lay dazed with his fall, sprang up the rungs of the ladder.

The top he found closed against him by two rough planks, between which filtered rays of light. These he found could easily be thrust aside, and standing on the top rung through a cloud of dust and a layer of rushes, he raised his head and shoulders above the level of the floor, and found himself looking into a room opposite a door that stood ajar letting in a flood of sunlight, whilst on a bench by the wall



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sat Bertha and Brown, with two armed men standing by them. These both stood open-eyed in amazement at his sudden burst into the room, but the cry of Sir Andrew from below: "Hold him for your lives!" brought one of them with a rush at Jock, whilst the other ran to guard the door.

But Jock, with one knee on the edge of the floor, reaching far forward, seized the first fellow by the ankle, with a jerk pulling him on his back and dragging him over the hole, and then, when he was clear himself, thrust the fallen man downwards, so that he fell partly on the ladder and partly on Sir Andrew, who, quickly recovering from his fall, was close behind in pursuit of Jock. The other guard, however, finding himself threatened by Jock and Edmund from different sides, stood aside and let them gain the door. The oaths of Sir Andrew and the fallen friar bursting through the trap-door showed that they would soon be in action again, and not knowing how many others might be at hand, with a word to the cleric, Jock took Bertha by the arm, and Brown taking the other, they almost lifted her off her feet in their flight down the hill, though she protested she was well able to run, and, in fact, as fleet of foot as they.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAPTURE OF SIR NINIAN

THUS they fled down the hill for the shelter of the belt of woodland at its foot, and from the doorway of the lodge above Sir Andrew could be heard bellowing forth some orders and urging the other fellows in pursuit, since he was too gross himself to hope to catch them.

They were within some hundred paces of the wood, and began to laugh at the knight's vain efforts to stop them, when their hopes of escape were suddenly dashed to the ground. From a narrow track through the wood there issued a line of horsemen, and in the front rode one between two who guarded him. Then Sir Andrew, welcoming their coming with a loud hallo of satisfaction, shouted an order that they should spread out and intercept the flight of the fugitives. Now all the horsemen but he who was guarded wore friars' habits, with hempen girdles over their armour.

Hearing Sir Andrew's shout, the riders drew rein in momentary hesitation, and then quickly taking in the state of affairs, some dozen of them galloped across the path of the three fugitives, who, seeing

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their escape cut off, could do no other than give way and retire up the hill before the horsemen to the level sward in front of the lodge, where the leader of the friars awaited in much contentment the coming of the troop.

But Sir Andrew's chief cause for glee was the sight of the prisoner on the led horse, who swung himself heavily out of the saddle, and, his face red with wrath, strode to confront Sir Andrew.

"So! The leader of the gang, which not so many days ago was chased into the hills."

"Even so, Sir Ninian," replied Sir Andrew mildly, "the fortune of war brings the friars on top this time."

Sir Ninian, trembling with rage, glanced around him.

"You are bold, sir, to carry your raids to my very gates at a time when the whole country is up in pursuit of you. Your triumph, I promise you, shall be short."

"It may be," replied Sir Andrew amiably, "but in the meantime, Sir Ninian, we friars are anxious for a parley with you, and have been driven to this rough way of bringing it about."

The knight bit his lip to control his passion into prudence.

"What would you have, and where have you put my son?"

"Your son is safe, and as for what we want of

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you, that were better discussed privily, and not before all these. If you will enter this poor lodge, which for a little we have borrowed of Sir William Mallory. . . ."

"Ay," interrupted Sir Ninian, "Sir William will have something to answer for to be found harbouring outlaws and robbers."

"You must do him no injustice. Sir William little knows the use to which we have put his hunting lodge, that his nephew, Sir Wilfred, begged of him, nor," he added significantly, "of all that it covers."

Sir Ninian deigning no further word, advanced with some curiosity to enter the lodge, but Sir Andrew stepped between.

"Not yet, Sir Ninian," he said; "a little preparation is needed to receive you decently, and is being made by two of my fellows within. The place is somewhat in disorder. I will see myself that all is ready," and disappeared, closing the door behind him.

Meantime the three fugitives, forgetting their own plight in wonder at the appearance of Markenfield in this place, stood looking curiously on at the meeting of the two men, and Sir Ninian's anger grew hot again when his eye fell upon them.

"Draglea! Again in league with these rascal friars. You keep fine company, boy. Sir Christopher will be proud when he knows how high his

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nephew sets his ambition. And you, ungrateful girl. No sooner am I gone from Markenfield than you break out, it seems, to join my enemies. Master Brown, this leadeth not to promotion in Holy Church."

Jock kept silence, disdaining to reply how he had risked his own freedom, and perhaps more, to rescue the knight's son, having little desire to tell of his humiliating failure. But Bertha said scornfully :

"No bars of yours shall ever keep me, Sir Ninian, robber yourself, since you would have taken my inheritance."

That stung Sir Ninian, but before he could find words to reply the deacon said :

"You have used your eyes to little purpose, Sir Ninian, if you do not see that we are as much captives as yourself, and no more leagued with these men than you."

But the knight had no opportunity to own to his mistake. At that moment the door of the lodge opened, and Sir Andrew came out, disordered and flurried, and invited Sir Ninian within, beckoning, too, to Jock, who stood with the others a little farther apart.

"This matter closely touches you, Master Drag-lea, as well as the Lady Bertha, and we would have you both within with Sir Ninian."

Nothing loath, they did his bidding and passed

The Capture of Sir Ninian

inside, and no sooner were they come into the room than a great surprise fell on them. For when the three fled from the lodge there were only left the two guards, who now stood there, one bearing the marks of the rough handling he had had from Jock; but now between them, held by either arm, was Richard Markenfield, his doublet torn and his face bloody with scratches. And Jock guessed that Richard, hearing sounds of conflict in the passage when the Scotch knight went down, had hastened to bear a hand in it, and then, seizing the opportunity to escape by the trap-door at the head of the ladder, had only fallen into the hands of the two guards and of Sir Andrew. But most of all did Jock wonder at seeing Sir Wilfred Mallory standing near the door awaiting them.

His face was ghastly white, and his eyes, unnaturally large and sombre, glowed with hidden fires, but he stood with his head up and a stern, set look on his face, and little of the mocking devilry of Mad Mallory when busy at his pranks.

Sir Andrew glanced furtively and anxiously at him from time to time, and motioned those who had entered into rough seats by the heavy square table, that now was placed exactly over the hole in the floor, this being concealed by a covering of rushes; but Bertha, taking no notice, went and sat apart on the bench by the wall, whilst Jock and Brown took their places at the table with Sir Ninian, who was dis-

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dainfully withdrawn, so far as he might, from the rest.

Then Sir Andrew bade the two guards leave the room, and signed to Richard, standing between them, also to be seated. After that he turned to Mallory and said :

"Is it your will, Sir Wilfred Mallory, that I should set forth our claim against Sir Ninian Markenfield?"

Mallory inclined his head.

"My will and your right, Sir Andrew, as the elder of us two. I would, too, that you hold back none of the truth of the matter, so as to justify fully our claims, since they can be justified, in the eyes of Sir Ninian and his son, and of Master Draglea, who already knoweth it in part, whilst Mistress Bertha hath still better knowledge."

"And she," said Sir Andrew, "must needs be a party to our agreement, if we come to one." Then he thought for a moment, clearing his voice, before he began thus :

"You will recollect, Sir Ninian," now and throughout addressing himself to him, "you will recollect Anthony Mallory, the elder, who was the youngest brother of the present Lord of Studley?"

"I recollect him," replied Sir Ninian stiffly, "as a ne'er-do-well, like his son Wilfred. I look for little good from that stock."

The Capture of Sir Ninian

For a moment a smile illumined the weary face of Mallory at this display of Markenfield's jealousy of his neighbour, and Sir Andrew rejoined with indignation :

"Then you do him wrong. Anthony was true and leal, as I know. But we will not quarrel over that. Now this Wilfred left home to make his fortune abroad, and Ralph of Clotheram went with him, these two being in the hot blood of youth and boon companions. They sailed together from the port of Hull as gentlemen adventurers on a ship fitted out by a merchant of the name, one Roger Staper; and I, a youth of the same age and like spirit, already in command of a barque, with letters of marque from King James of Scotland, chased and took them on the high seas, and so began my acquaintance with these two men of Rippon. I showed them the riches that might be gathered by a roving shipman. We became sworn brothers. They in a ship provided out of my gains preyed on French traders, whilst I had my choice in other directions."

"In plain English," broke in Sir Ninian, "you were pirates, those pestilent rogues infesting the narrow seas, from whom, the saints be praised, King Harry has in a large measure delivered us."

"Call us what you will," replied the leader of the friars in even tones, "'tis an honourable calling, and many of your English noble still follow it at the Scilly Isles. We found it profitable enough, and a

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right joyous life, with plunder and revelry to delight the red blood in a man's heart. At one merry meeting in Antwerp, where we put in with our holds full of rich stuffs, we took an oath to share and share alike till death, and that when death came to any one of us, his plunder should go to the survivors or the heirs of their bodies.

"Clotheram was the first to lose his luck. First one ship and then another he cast away, and we had to mortgage ours to meet his needs. Withal he showed no gratitude. Nay, Mistress Bertha, keep your seat and glower not at me. I am not one to abuse a dead man, and I bear no malice against him, but the truth must out, if I am to make my tale good to Sir Ninian.

"And the truth is that one day Clotheram's ship left the company of her consorts, and was never seen again.

"How Mallory and I, finding little profit now in sailing the narrow seas, parted company, he to try his luck in the Lévant against the Turk, and how in a desperate fight he was killed attempting to board a galleass does not concern you or the matter now in hand. It is enough that I was the only one left of the band of three; and I, serving my King against his enemies, and making what livelihood I could, found myself, as the years went by, growing old for the work. Then one day, two winters ago, Wilfred Mallory's son, Sir Wilfred here, came aboard at

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Antwerp. He was the image of his father. He had but to say who he was, and I believed him and the strange tale he told me."

Sir Andrew hesitated and looked for a moment in doubt at Mallory, who, with his eyes steadily fixed on him, slowly shook his head. The Scotch knight in some embarrassment continued:

"You people of Rippon know of Sir Wilfred's boyhood. He was left by his father, my comrade, in the charge of his brother, Sir William. Whilst still a mere lad he accompanied the Abbot of Fountains on a mission to Rome. Returning by sea he was taken by the Moors, but soon escaped. . . . It was some years after that he came to me at Antwerp. His mind was set on a great project that he hath, and before long he had won me to it. But a great sum, a desperately great sum, was needed to carry it out. Despairing of raising it by sea ventures alone, we got together the band of friars, finding a small remnant of those who for generations had lived the life of Robin Hood in the Hambleton Hills. Then began our schemes for relieving those who had overmuch wealth of some part of it for our ends.

"There came to join our band of friars one of Clotheram's old crew, a one-eyed rascal. He had a tale of rich plunder of jewels and gold gathered by old Ralph in the East after he had deserted us. It was stored with a merchant in Hull, he said, and

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Clotheram was come home to die of a calenture. We found out his story was a true one. The treasure which Clotheram left to his daughter was for two parts of it mine and Sir Wilfred's here by the oath which was taken at Antwerp. Sir Wilfred was well within his rights, therefore, when he laid his plans to marry Clotheram's heiress and get possession of the jewels, and it was you, Sir Ninian, who did the wrong in carrying her off for your son. After that Draglea here must needs bear a hand in the game. With all the luck that unfairly falls to meddlers, with his own might of hand, and by reason of Sir Wilfred's folly in staking all on his fight with him, he sent our plans agley. He has tricked us and removed the treasure. But for his cursed interference and your avarice, Sir Ninian, the money we wanted for Sir Wilfred's great venture would be under our hand."

"There you reckon without the treasure's rightful owner," cried Bertha from her bench, unable to keep silence.

"Well, well," said Sir Andrew good-humouredly, "there was no knowing what a woman might do, least of all old Clotheram's tiger-cub. You will not deny you let Sir Wilfred carry you off. Nay, there, my good girl, I meant not to raise your ire. Hush, you little spitfire, let me finish my tale.

"Through you, Sir Ninian, we lost jewels worth some twenty thousand pounds: from you 'tis but

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justice that we recover a part of our loss. Therefore we took and hold your son to ransom. Draglea, who is ever doing something fantastic and unexpected, turned round and swore at Hood that you or your son, it matters not which, should have the dowry. With all four of you now in our hands, it lies with you, Sir Ninian, to make an offer for the freedom of yourself and your son."

So ending, he looked to Sir Ninian to speak, Markenfield pointed to Jock with his finger.

"You are in error, Sir Robber. Master Draglea here can put you right."

Thus called upon, Jock spoke with reluctance & shame.

"My Lord of Markenfield hath not, as you suppose, the Clotheram jewels in his possession, for though I made such a promise, yet I afterwards felt pity for the maiden, and repenting the evil I had done, gave them back to her."

"A plague on your pity," cried Sir Ninian. "What pity can absolve a man from his plighted word to another? Even the Jew Jephthah kept his word like a gentleman against his own daughter."

Jock raged in silence under this affront. Had all gone well that day, the rescue of Richard might have balanced his broken promise. But that had failed, and it sorely hurt his pride to be charged with breach of faith. A forlorn hope came into his mind.

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"Tell me," he said to Sir Andrew. "What do ye ask for Sir Ninian's and Richard's ransom?"

Sir Andrew whispered with Sir Wilfred by his side and then replied :

"It would be little enough at ten thousand crowns, half the value of the jewels. But since you say Sir Ninian has them not, why, let it be five thousand. He can well bear that."

"You have said you need me for this secret venture of Sir Wilfred's?"

"We need all the good men we can get, and Sir Wilfred sets a special value on you."

"Am I worth a thousand crowns?"

His demand wrung an oath from the Scotch knight's thrifty soul, but Sir Wilfred, nodding and crying, "Ay, give him a thousand," he grumbled out :

"You rate yourself high, young sir ; yet Sir Wilfred is eager to have you, and so I say 'Yes' to that."

Jock now with a little hope turned to Sir Ninian.

"The thousand shall go to you as soon as I have it, and the rest shall be made up, if time be given. You shall yet call me a true man, Sir Ninian, and no pledge-breaker."

To the wonder of all, the Lady Bertha suddenly spoke.

"Ay, and he shall so prove himself here and now, for I will give up to him such part of the jewels as

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he may need to pay the full debt. No one shall say that John Draglea is false to his word."

Sir Andrew struck the table in admiration.

"Well done, lass! You have all old Ralph's spirit and more than his honesty."

But Jock was in a storm of conflicting passions. His honour saved! Saved by a woman! Yet saved by her! There was both sweet and bitter, ecstasy and humiliation in that. But how to save his pride with her?

"Mistress, I cannot have it so."

"Then be branded as a liar by Markenfield."

"It will be your deed, not mine, that upholds my faith."

"The jewels are yours by right."

"How so?"

"Shame on you to need reminding you are my man and all mine yours."

Jock's heart leapt with wonder at such a speech before them all; but Sir Ninian was now speaking to the Scottish knight.

"We are in the power of you and your friars, and must perforce submit to your terms. Your tale of your dealings with your fellow pirates counts for little with me against Clotheram's own charge on his death-bed to wed his girl with all her lands and goods to Markenfield. But since the naughty jade rebels against her father's dying commands, I must needs wash my hands of her and hers."

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At that speech Bertha, who was trying to turn a deaf ear to some broken thanks from Jock, and to evade his earnest glances, shot a fiery look at Sir Ninian, and was bursting out with an angry denial of their truth, but Sir Andrew interrupted her.

"Tut, tut, girl. Leave him alone and listen to me. What of the money?"

"I will go to Hull with you and put it in your hands," said she.

"Good," he replied, "and Draglea shall ride with us, for it is at Hull that he shall take his orders. We rely on the girl's word with regard to the money, Sir Ninian. You and your son shall be set free this day; but I must have your undertaking that ye do nothing against us friars nor come near this place till to-morrow at dawn."

"Agreed," said Sir Ninian, bending his head haughtily, but overjoyed at heart to hear Sir Andrew's offer.

It was in the dead of night in the hour that precedes the first gleam of light in the eastern sky that a red glare shone into the Wakeman's window, where he dwelt by the riverside in St. Annesgate. With visions of fines, should some citizen's house be found in flames, he hastily caught up his doublet and ran out into the street. There he found Sir Christopher and sundry others of the citizens looking up at a redness of the sky towards the west.

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"'Tis in Westgate," cried Sir Christopher, "and with a west wind blowing you will have all Crossgate and even Kirkgate itself in flames, Master Wakeman, if you gather not your men quickly." And all began running past the church and the Archbishop's palace up Kirkgate on to Holly Hill. There Master Terrie's fears were relieved, for it became plain that the fire was outside the city.

Running on into Westgate, they came to a great mass of people looking out towards Gillett Hill, where flames and smoke rolled up from the woods. And had it been any other place, many had been hurrying to the very scene of the fire, but they held back from a nearer approach in the night, for some said :

"Strange things have been seen yonder of late hard by the Chimney, and this may be another hellish prank."

And so they stayed there gazing fearfully, whilst they crossed themselves and mumbled charms against the power of the Evil One.

Then the Wakeman, seeing that a fire at Studley was no business of his or theirs, called upon all to disperse and go to their beds. In spite of him they would have lingered, but even as he renewed his warning the flames shot thrice as high above the tree tops, and there burst upon their ears a clap of thunder that made all flee in terror to their houses, so that in a few minutes they were quaking within

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doors, and not a soul was to be seen in the streets of the town.

But Sir Ninian Markenfield, going forth at break of day with his man to search the hunting lodge, to which he had been taken the day before, found nothing but a blackened smouldering hollow where it had stood.

Others had watched the flames from afar, from Blois Hill on the other side of Rippon a little off the road to York. These were Sir Andrew and Jock, and riding with them the Mistress of Clotheram.

And when the clap of thunder came to them faintly across the alarmed town, they were not a whit dismayed, but Sir Andrew led the way down the hill into the road saying :

"So that is done, and Sir Wilfred will be setting forth at once, but will not meet us till we come to Hull, for he will pick up men at Hutton and go by the hills, and in twos and threes they will enter the seaport, so avoiding notice, and it behoves us to be getting forward to York, since day is breaking."

What passed between Bertha and Jock in that second ride to the port of Hull cannot be told here, for the subject of their talk has never been revealed by Jock, from whom comes the tale of most of the doings and happenings of those days, nor, I imagine, with a third, Sir Andrew, ever by their side, could

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there have been many occasions for private talk between them.

There is better knowledge, however, of what passed when, on the day of the sailing of the ship from Hull, Sir Wilfred and Sir Andrew stepped into the boat to join their men already embarked. Then Sir Andrew with a wave of farewell to Bertha, after commending her to the care of John Carter, her steward, called to Jock, lingering ashore, to come aboard, whilst the tide still served.

But Jock stood thus betwixt sea and shore, looking earnestly on Bertha, who, as if turned to stone, fixed on him her great eyes, in which shone something softer than the hard setting of her face.

And Jock was in doubt which interpreted her heart best, the immobility of her brow and lips, or what he saw in her eyes. And so he bent and kissed her hand, which she thrust out to him, and when he lifted his head her frozen look had thawed, and her lips quivered as she said :

"Return safe and I will thank Heaven."

And he :

"If I come back, would that I might hope. . . ."

But she with a quiver smile finished his halting words :

"You might hope to have revenge for the blow I struck you."

Before he could answer that, Sir Andrew broke into their parting.

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"Your man shall come back safe to you, Mistress Bertha, if I can bring him, but now you must keep him no longer, or the tide will fail us."

At that rude interruption Bertha tossed her head and drew away, turning, however, before she had gone many steps, to wave a farewell to the speeding boat.

CHAPTER XIX

SIR WILFRED'S GREAT ADVENTURE AND HIS HOME-COMING

FOR the third time since Jock sailed away on the unknown adventure, Lammaside had come round again in Rippon.

On the eve of St. Wilfrid's feast, some two hours after mid-day, the town folk were leaving their daily toil, and in brave show of holiday dress made their way by Stammergate, Kirkgate, or Bondgate to the York road to meet and bring in St. Wilfrid, some crossing by the stepping stones farther down the Skell, others splashing ankle-deep through the drought-dwindled stream at the ford of St. Annesgate, if too impatient to wait their turn by the narrow Archer Brig, crowded by those who would go dry-footed.

In the wood that fringed the York road waited St. Wilfrid, or rather he who represented him, on horseback, with his attendant Saxon footman standing ready to hold the Saint's bridle when he should start to make his entry into the city and church, to be received with acclamation by the people. So had he entered eight hundred years ago after his exile, and

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so year by year he must be welcomed still, so long as Rippon endured and remembered its great patron saint.

Along Whitcliffe Lane came riding three abreast the young Lord of Markenfield, with a lady on either hand. His two-year-old bride and her dear gossip, Bertha of Clotheram, went with him to witness the entry of the saint and to evince the devout interest that Markenfield ever took in the festivals of the Church.

After Sir Ninian's death and the quick wooing by the young heir of his chosen bride, Margaret took pity on Bertha's lonely estate in her Tower of Clotheram. That mannish maiden, though softer grown of late, at first met her advances with scorn or coldness. But of jealousy to keep them apart there could be none, for the resistance both of Richard and of Bertha to Sir Ninian's designs for their marriage had been patent to all who knew them. Soon, therefore, the shrew of Clotheram, much tamed and altered by the wild events of that Lammastide two years ago, was melted by the young bride's gentleness, and before many months had gone fell into the habit of passing three parts of the year at Markenfield.

It was natural that on the eve of another St. Wilfrid's feast the happenings of that other should be recalled. Indeed, the young Markenfield could talk of little else, since only the day before he had received a momentous letter from John Dragle,

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dated from London, and this letter he took from his pouch, as he rode, and tried for the hundredth time to find some fresh meaning in it.

"Count it no slight, dear playfellow, if I have left thee overlong without tidings of my weary wanderings, since, by my last messenger you heard from me of those who gathered in the pilgrim ships that set forth from Venice in the spring of the year. The tale of what came to pass after that, and until I landed in England, must now wait. No pen so nimble, no paper so large for what I have to say. Now am I in London town, where have been still more great and unexpected happenings. To cope with these latter, fingers stiffened by stouter work, shrink from making the essay. Yet all shall be told within few days by word of mouth, if God will.

"There are matters that must be set in order here. These done, I take horse for my native Rippon, where it will be greater joy than I have known these two years to greet you again and others whom I love in the old town. Till then the Holy Trinity have you in His keeping.

"Given at Westminster.

"JOHN DRAGLEA."

"You hear, Bertha," commented Margaret, as Markenfield read this again for about the fifth time at her request, "'others whom I love in Rippon.' 'Tis

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like a lover to write thus vaguely. We know whom he means."

The other girl flushed, and said a little bitterly :

"Belike he had in his mind Sir Christopher and Master Edmund Brown."

"And someone else," said Isabel archly.

"I know your meaning," replied Bertha bluntly, "but Clotheram is not in Rippon, and, I pray you, build not up these fantasies of John Dragle's love for me. Rather was there hate between us in the beginning, hate long forgone by me, yet hate; and though by what he said before he left, his hate and scorn, too, had vanished, yet. . . ."

"Yet, yet," mocked Margaret, "trust a woman who has loved for guessing the truth in a lover's heart. Your man comes back to you, and more your man for this parting."

"My man ! That is an old and a silly tale. 'Twas asserted by Sir Ninian, and known to all, that there was a mock marriage only. Only fear of the King's displeasure, should it be discovered, kept Sir Christopher from applying to the Holy Father in Rome on that matter, and afterwards it was said that no need was, when Sir Christopher had heard what John the priest of Hood had to say anent the marriage."

Richard Markenfield laughed.

"You two have oft debated that point, and the truth of it will not be known, it seems, till Jock himself returns. 'Tis enough for the present that he is

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coming; and for my part I blithely look forward to his coming. Sir Christopher, too, hath had a message from him, and knoweth something that he could hardly keep to himself, when he rode to Markenfield yesternoon. 'We must leave to Jock himself,' quotha, 'to tell the great news, but the dear lad hath done fine things, and none so proud as his uncle.' His great rumbling voice shook when he spoke of him. The masterful Canon said what I never heard him acknowledge before: 'I have mistook the lad.' But he would make amends, 'by St. Wilfrid,' he swore, when Jock came home, 'even Sir Ninian, had he lived, would have opened his arms to him.' So said the Canon, and there is much meaning in his words."

Thus talking they splashed through the Skell, and meeting St. Wilfrid already setting forth, they turned in behind, and took their place in his procession.

So round the town by Annesgate and Stammergeate, by All Hallowgate and Horsefaire, over Holly Hill and down the slope of Kirkgate the procession swarmed on to the west door of the church, the people roared out their welcome, and the pretended Saint proud and stiff in his vestments on his horse.

On they came out of the narrow approach into the more open space in front of the church. But there they found a little group gathered apart by the door, two tall horsemen in front and back of a horse-litter, which they carried, and others of the same party a

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little behind them. And when a trumpet, sounded by the Saxon guide, announced that St. Wilfrid drew nigh, the door of the church was thrown open, the clergy of the Chapter, the Canons and Vicars and Mass-priests, with deacons and sub-deacons and thuriblers, a' in their robes, issued forth to welcome the Saint, and to bring him into the church.

Both these and the heads of the procession turned their eyes aside upon the strangers who stood by, and on what they were doing with the horse-litter.

For when the procession was heard coming down the street the two tall horsemen dismounted, and taking out the horses in front and rear, that carried the litter, they stepped themselves between the poles, one in front and one behind, and took it up, being both of them men of mighty stature and strength; and as St. Wilfrid passed on his horse, they fell in behind him and in front of those who followed close upon the Saint.

And coming to the steps of the church the Saint dismounted, while the Saxon held his horse, as the custom is, and went up into the church conducted by the clergy to take his seat in St. Wilfrid's chair. Then the two strangers made to pass in with him into the church. Thereupon there arose a murmur among the priests, and angry cries at such presumption from the crowd, who pressed in behind to see the ceremony.

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But Sir Christopher Draglea stood out on the steps in his robes, and holding up his hand, said :

"Let be. These men have good reason and right to come thus into the church."

And for the moment all were abashed by Sir Christopher, and the more so when it was seen, with much amazement, that behind him stood no other than the Lord of Studley, Sir William Mallory, and with him Walworth, the bailiff of His Grace the Archbishop. And so before, in their astonishment, aught else could be done or said, they had passed up the nave ; but the two men going on put down the litter in the very opening of the door into the choir and right beneath the rood-cross.

But Sir Christopher climbed up into the pulpit in the nave, where the vicars give out their notices to the people, and where on this day the custom was to read out some passages in the life of the great saint.

And again there were angry murmurings and much curious questioning in the crowd at the intrusion of the strangers, which would have broken out into something more but for the fear they had of Sir Christopher and of Sir William Mallory, and it was noted besides with wonder that the Archbishop's bailiff had stood by Sir Christopher before he went up into the pulpit, and had looked with favour on the two men and the litter. Therefore their mutterings died away, and they grew still to listen to what Sir Christopher had to say.

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When he began to speak it was plain to all that the Canon was more than usually moved, and that he held grasped in his hand a parchment with a great leaden seal hanging from it. And so he began :

"Men of Rippon, it hath been a good and laudable custom of old time that as on this day, when ye bring in St. Wilfrid, passages of his life should be read out to you from this pulpit; how bright and burning flames, yet harmless, broke out in the house at his birth, and the healing of a certain Governor's sickness by the Holy Saint's powers. But to-day I see you are stirred and distracted by your wrath at what these two men have done in carrying a bier in the Saint's following, and at their presumption, as ye count it.

"But I say unto you that they are putting no slight upon St. Wilfrid and his church; rather are they bringing fresh glory to both. Seemeth that a hard saying? Come then, let me reason with you. For what did St. Wilfrid that he is held in honour here? Ye will say he made a beginning of building this church : he established the Catholic Faith in the north. Ye say well. And what, think you, did the poor clay that lieth hidden in yonder bier, that hath raised your ire? Hark to the answer. That unhappy soul, tormented on earth, but now, as it please God, called Blessed in Heaven, hath by his little might done what all great Christendom sought to do and failed. Your Christian Kings and Emperors, your Lords, Dukes and Princes for these three

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hundred years have sworn, time and again, to recover from the heathen the Holy Sepulchre of your Saviour and, maugre them all, that Holy Place remained under the heavy heel of the infidel. Their armed might hath not compassed a deliverance: they promised but could not perform. Meantime goeth that poor broken body down there, goeth with a little fellowship of men, and hath done gloriously what they miserably could not accomplish. Seem I to you distraught? Do I tell you a miracle? Ay, a miracle in very truth. Let me say it again in plain words. He yonder, now lying dead, for the love of God and the salvation of his soul, gathered a little six hundred all told, and crossing the sea, took and held for a night and a day the Tomb of your Lord in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

"Ay, ye murmur and ye nudge. Some of you believe not. All are amazed. And well might it be so, for upon your town, men of Rippon, hath come this great splendour, and he, who so honoureth you, lies there, a mighty champion, whom from henceforth ye should hold second only to the Holy Saint himself.

"Ye would know more? Is that what ye mutter among yourselves? Then let an eye-witness speak and say how it came to pass that I bungle not the story. The tall knight yonder, who standeth by the bier, Sir Andrew Melville, a gallant gentleman, honoured by the King, he shall tell you. Sir Andrew,

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I conjure you to stand forth, and remember to do full justice to him who lieth there."

Then the taller and the stouter of those two tall fellows took some steps nearer to the people, and opened his mouth to speak, but seeing all their eyes fixed curiously and breathlessly upon him, he halted for a little in his speech in some dismay, but looking aside his glance fell upon the bier, and at once his voice grew strong and steady, and a fire kindled in his eye as he spoke.

"I am but a plain soldier, and take no stock of fine words and gallant phrases, but as far as in me lieth, ye shall hear without any sort of garnishment a faithful tale of what yonder dead man did overseas and why, as Sir Christopher saith, ye should let him lie there in peace and should even hold him in honour.

"We started, six hundred of us, with him our leader, at the spring of the year, from Venice, in the first pilgrim ships that left for Jaffa, the haven of Jerusalem. There we landed, our pilgrim garb covering harness and weapons, our sallets transformed by cloth coverings into pilgrim hats. And landing on the sands of the Holy Land we scattered and made our journey in companies by twos and threes, until we entered with other pilgrims into the Holy City. And at dusk, when the godless Turk dreamed not that he had an armed enemy within his gates, one party going round fell upon their guards all unwitting and took their strong places; and

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another party, seizing upon the Holy Sepulchre, ran up the flag of the Cross, that had not been seen there for many a year. After that we cleared the Holy Places of the abomination of the heathen, even as Christ Himself cleansed the Temple of its defilements. On the sacred ground one of our number in the orders of a priest, who had come with us with that intent, administered the Mass to all the soldiers, half at a time kneeling before him, while the other half fought. And when that had been done and Christ honoured in the place of His burial, we stood to it as well as we might, for the heathen had gathered in their thousands against us.

"And all night and far into the next day we fought under the Cross, and they under the flag of their Prophet, until there was a great heap of dead shutting us in, and our band of six hundred rallying all together had shrunk to less than a third part.

"Then as it grew towards the second night, our leader, sorely wounded after slaying and slaying with his lightning sword, until his arm had drooped with weariness, took his post where he could see down the length of the street that runneth towards the western gate, to watch the setting of the sun over the house-tops. And by and by the sun sank out of sight and it began to grow dusk. Then our leader cried out blithe and glad :

"Enough, comrades ! We have done what we could. For a night and a day we have kept Christ's

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grave. Now gather in a last rally and let us break out by the western gate, and, if we may, escape in the darkness to our ship by the coast.' And so saying fell senseless to the ground, fainting under his wounds."

Here the knight called Sir Andrew, broke off and strode a few paces forth and back before the people in the church, his head bent and his hands clasped behind him, and when he began to speak again, it was slowly and in phrases that halted in their midst, and he was much moved by that which he told.

"We carried him out and down the street, him whom I loved dearer than a son. The heathen could not stand before our grief and wrath. But outside the gate, before the darkness had quite fallen, the unbelievers were able to get at us the better with their thousands in the open spaces, and we must perforce retreat for shelter to a walled place with a house in its midst by the wayside, and so defend ourselves.

"Now it happened that we had laid him down in a little room that we found at the back, and with him two others that could no longer stand to fight. But soon a great outcry arising, that the main gate of the enclosure was like to be forced, we rallied there, and had hard fighting till the enemy seemed suddenly to lose heart and draw off. But in the very moment that we rejoiced to have a breathing space, again there came cries for help from the back, and running there we found another party, whilst we were engaged in

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front, had broken through the guards set there and were surging up against us.

"That night nothing could withstand our onslaught, and soon we had thrust them out, leaving their dead in heaps behind. After that I went to the little room to bind up the wounds of our comrades who had been set down in it; and then there was a terrible thing to see, for the infidels had broken in upon them, and two of them they had carved with their swords till they could not be known for men; and he, our leader, stripped bare to the flesh, lay with a great wound that they had given him out of mockery, in the shape of a cross, two broad red bands of two fingers' width, out of which spouted his life blood."

Sadly and gently the tall knight told the rest of his tale.

"Whilst we two knelt by him, seeking to staunch that streaming wound, he thrust our hands aside. 'Let be,' he faintly cried; 'where was my shame and perdition, there hath my Saviour laid His sign of glory and salvation: a token that He hath wrested me from the power of the Evil One,' and there was the light of much joy in his face.

"A few moments only did he live after that, time enough to make us swear that his body should rest one night under the rood in the Church of St. Wilfrid, if it were possible, on the eve of his name-saint's festival, and afterwards that prayer should be made

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to the Abbot of Fountains that he might finally sleep in the Abbey, where for a brief time he had been a novice.

"So far, men of Rippon, by the great good fortune that then attended my comrade and myself, those dying commands have been exactly performed. For although all but a handful fell in the march to the coast, we two cut our way through, and, getting aboard with our charge, escaped from the land in our pilgrim dress to the island of Cyprus. Finding one skilled in the Egyptian art of embalming, we placed him in the cedar coffin, and there if ye will, ye may look on the face of the man who held the Holy Sepulchre a night and a day for Christendom."

Then all the people in the church cried out :

"Who is he? What is his name?"

And Sir Andrew answered :

"He is Sir Wilfred Mallory, nephew of Sir William here, your neighbour, brought up amongst you, and once a novice in the Abbey of Fountains."

So astounded was the congregation at that, that this saint and hero should be Mad Mallory, the roysterer, suspected of dealings with outlaws and robbers, that in the gasp of wonder which kept them still, Sir William Mallory, finding his opportunity, took from Sir Christopher's hand the parchment with the seal attached, and coming to Sir Andrew's side, said to the people :

"That there may be no doubt in your minds that

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this great feat of holding the Sepulchre was indeed conceived and done by my dead kinsman, this writing of our Holy Father the Pope, brought into England by consent of our Lord the King, testifies to the same. Herein is written that after examination had of witnesses our Holy Father thus confidently affirms that, under the leadership of Sir Wilfred Mallory of Studley, near Rippon, Sir Andrew Melville, a knight of Scotland, and John Draglea, also of Rippon, the Sepulchre of our Saviour was in very truth held and maintained under the flag of the Cross for a night and a day : that Sir Wilfred Mallory being overcome and stricken to death, Sir Andrew Melville and John Draglea did, through many grievous perils, convey the body of their leader to Christian lands and passed through Rome, where his Holiness hath seen and talked with them, and by these patents his Holiness, after commending the two soldiers, Sir Andrew and Draglea, to the notice of their Sovereign Lords for their Christian prowess, doth call upon the Chapter of the Collegiate Church of St. Wilfrid, and furthermore the Brothers of the Abbey of Fountains, near Rippon, to do their utmost to carry out the wishes of the late Sir Wilfred Mallory as expressed to Sir Andrew Melville and John Draglea in respect of his burial. And further be it said," continued Sir William, folding up the parchment, "that these two being come to London, where the fame of their deeds had gone before, His Grace the King was graciously

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pleased to receive them at his Court in Westminster, and after doing suitable honour to Sir Andrew, who owes allegiance to another Prince, has knighted John Draglea of Rippon under the title of Sir John Draglea of Jerusalem."

After that, awed and stricken into a whispering wonder, at a word from Sir Christopher the people passed up the church to the cedar coffin, off which the lid had been taken, and there they saw Sir Wilfred's face set calm and beautiful, as it had been in his boyhood, and his breast laid bare to show the scar of the cross, with his hands clasped above, as though to press it to his heart; and the wonder of it kept all silent, so that they did not even dare to give greeting to Jock o' Rippon kneeling in prayer by the coffin, who had been unrecognised at first by reason of the beard he had grown. And so, after looking, all passed out of the church, leaving those two on their knees to watch and pray through the night by Sir Wilfred, as they had sworn.

And when the morning light came through the transept windows, dimming the candles set by the bier, they rose stiff from their knees and pale with their vigil; and putting the lid on the cedar coffin, they carried it to the bier, and going between the shafts, Sir Andrew in front and Sir John Draglea behind, they came out into the early sunlight of the August morning into the space by the west door, and looking down from the top of the steps, they saw the

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whole of the open space there and far up Kirkgate filled with a great gathering of people, who bared their heads and made a line for them to pass down.

In front of all these stepped forward Master Richard Terrie the Wakeman, with his attendant Twelve Brethren, and said so that he could be well heard of all :

"We are here, sirs, to show reverence to the dead and honour to yourselves, and we, that is I, the Wakeman and the Twelve Brethren of this town of Rippon, would fain carry the bier between us, for we hear that you take it to the Abbey of Fountains."

And Sir Andrew said gravely :

"'Tis a great honour that you offer Sir Wilfred and ourselves, and in it, Master Terrie, you show your nobility of heart, for it cometh into my mind that near this spot Sir Wilfred and I did violence to your person. For that misdeed I here ask your pardon for myself and for the dead man. For him I would say that he was at that time not in his right senses and knew not what he did. But Sir John Draglea and I have brought this coffin from overseas, and again from London to this city, and we have sworn that our task shall not end until we have carried it with our own hands to Fountains and there laid it where Sir Wilfred would rest."

And so they were allowed to go on their way, and much people went with them. And when they came to Fountains they found the Abbot and the

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monks waiting to receive them; and thus Sir Wilfred was laid in holy ground. And since they regarded him not merely as one of their brotherhood, but as equal in merit for what he had done to the highest and holiest there, they placed him where none but an Abbot of the Order had a right to lie, within the Choir itself, where the sun through the great east window would throw the shadow of the rood on his resting-place.

CHAPTER XX

BERTHA AND SIR JOHN OF JERUSALEM

Now, when all had been done duly and faithfully by those two in leal observance of their oath and promise to that poor restless soul Mad Mallory, Sir Andrew would have bade farewell and departed for his own country forthwith, for such of the friars as had gone with them were dead and the rest disbanded. But Jock was loath to part with so true-hearted a comrade, and persuaded him to accept for a short time the hospitality which the Canon offered him in the Prebend House. So it was that in the summer evening after the burial at Fountains they were gathered in the great hall of the Canon's house, to which, through the open windows, came distant sounds of the mirth and merry-making of the feast of St. Wilfrid. And there were present the Lord and Lady Markenfield, Bertha of Clotheram and Edmund Brown, eagerly waiting to hear the full tale of the Holy Land adventure.

And Edmund Brown said that for his part, having thought deeply, he believed the Devil had made a powerful and determined effort to extend his dominion in and about Rippon; and that amongst his

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other activities the Evil One had sent one of his satellites to enter into Sir Wilfred and to prompt all his mad doings; but that being brought so near to the burial place of our Saviour, the Demon, holding his throne in Sir Wilfred's body, had been shaken on it, and finally had been driven forth in confusion by the Sign of the Cross cut on Sir Wilfred and by his joyful surrender of himself to his Lord.

But Sir Andrew roundly asserted that Mallory had a noble heart in which no demon could for a moment dwell, and as for his furious fits and his mad doings, he had himself heard him hint of a stroke that he had gotten from the sun in the heats of Africa.

Then the Canon, after listening in silence to what these two had to say, gave his judgment thus: that Sir Wilfred was, like many others, part good and part evil. "Often," he said, "do I find in myself the old man of my earlier soldier life fighting with the claims and duties of my present sacred calling, and of that opposition my enemies have made much. But I pray that my end may be like Sir Wilfred's, for in him the good prevailed at the end."

Again after that all sat silent, musing on what had been said, until Margaret, who had a great purpose in her heart, thinking the time had come for it, said she and Bertha would go walk in the garden by the Skell, whilst the others debated those grave matters. But shortly after returning to the Hall she called to Sir John Draglea and asked him to come to the

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water-side, since Matthew the Hermit had but now come over the bridge and was inquiring for him, and so ran off again; and Jock, going out, found no Matthew Hermit by the water-side, nor Margaret herself, but Bertha of Clotheram standing alone; and Bertha said that Margaret had gone into the house to give a message that she had forgotten to her husband Richard.

And thinking she would soon return and explain these two different tales, they stood there for a while without speaking further, awkward both of them, and looking away to the other side of the river. In the end it was the man who spoke first.

"A glad day and a glad moment this, Mistress."

"Ay, to see thy boyhood's friends again, Richard and Edmund."

"And more than these."

"Yes, Sir Christopher, and your other friends."

Disconcerted by this wilful avoidance of his meaning, he tried a different approach.

"I was true to my promise to right your wrong so far as I might."

"My wrong?"

"The wrong I did you at Hood. At Rome we were high in favour, and some of those best learned in Canon law gave me counsel whether our marriage might be set aside."

"Ay, and they said?"

"It was agreed by all that it was no marriage,

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since John of Hood maimed the rites, and that all that was necessary was proof of this. That proof I will compel him to give me."

"No need for that," replied Bertha coldly, "he has already acknowledged it to Sir Ninian, when he still hoped to get me for his son."

"Ah!" said Jock, "then there is nothing binding us."

"No. You are as free as the wind."

"I?" said Jock, staggered and stammering, "I—it was not I that was in question."

"Was it not you that made all the pother at Rome to loosen the tie that bound us two? Well then, you have your will."

"But—but it was you that was entrapped, you that would be free from a false traitor and deceiver."

"Make no excuses, John Draglea," she said loftily; "have I stood in the way of your freedom?"

Jock gasped again. He had never dreamed of having the tables thus turned upon him.

"What—what——? Did you not say at Hood you would rather be mated with the meanest hind?"

"Your memory is not good, Sir John of Jerusalem. I said that of Sir Wilfred. Besides——"

"But you said you knew not which of us you hated most."

"Of course I did, and meant it; and did not you hate me?"

"Ah!" replied Jock, "there we come to it. You

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hate me, while I, alack, before we came to Hull in that journey, could conceive nothing more desirable than the bond uniting us two."

"Yet now you have broken the bond."

"Nay, nay, you are unjust. I but discovered there was no bond, and you charge me with breaking it."

She looked shyly at him under her eyelids.

"It is a way we women have, Sir John. You are dull not to see through a woman's contradictions."

Then Jock made a bold bid for fortune. Bertha suddenly felt her chin held in a firm grasp and her face pulled up to meet Jock's searching eyes.

"Tell me, lass, without more twisting and turnings. Are you blithe or sad to know we are not in truth man and wife?"

"The breaking of the bond troubles me not."

"Ha! I feared so," said Jock, dropping her chin, and turning sorrowfully away.

"It troubles me not," she repeated, "since 'tis so easily repaired."

Jock swung round, scarce thinking he heard aright.

"Can it be repaired, my dear? Say that again," and seized both her hands. She drew her right away and shook her head, though her eyes, uplifted to him, contradicted the action.

"I fear you too much."

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"Fear me—fear me?" said Jock, "me, who love you so? How can that be?"

For answer she raised the hand she had withdrawn, and parted the hair that had grown on his cheek.

"I cannot find it," she said, "but it must be there."

"What mean you?" he said, thrilling under her touch, and drawing her to him by the other hand.

"Why, the scar that I gave you. Rememberest thy promise?"

Jock laughed aloud. "Ay, the little vixen that you were. Ay, I remember!"

"And your oath that some day I should pay for it. Jock Draglea used to be noted for ever keeping his word."

Jock laughed again in sheer joy and drew her face close to his.

"Why, so I am still. Paid thou shalt be, and with this coin," he retorted, covering her lips with his own.

